Integrating ICT in enhancing students' speaking skills: potentials and limitations

Mohammed GHEDEIR BRAHIM[1] / Asma NESBA
University of El-Oued-Algeria/ghedeir.mohammed@univ-eloued.dz
University of El-Oued-Algeria/nesba-asma@univ-eloued.dz

Abstract

The present study discusses how ICT can be used effectively in tertiary education to enhance speaking skills of the EFL learners. As English today is regarded as a lingua franca, the skill of speaking has become one of paramount significance to acquire. This research work puts the spot light on the potentials and limitations of integrating ICT in teaching oral expression for the students of second year English at the University Hamma Lakhdar, El-Oued, Algeria. The purpose of this paper is to investigate, interpret and analyze the methods used by teachers in order to enhance students' English skills and to provide suggestions as how to use ICT more productively to enhance mainly their speaking skills. It also sheds light on the difficulties encountered by teachers in integrating those technologies in teaching oral expression. Seeking to achieve the aims of the study, two questionnaires have been administered to both

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[1] - Mohammed GHEDEIR BRAHIM

students and teachers. Five (05) teachers experienced the teaching of oral expression in addition to twenty (20) students of second year English have been chosen randomly. The study was conducted during the academic year 2017/2018 at the Department of English, the University Hamma Lakhdar of El-Oued, Algeria. The findings of this study show that ICT is directly beneficial to enhance learners speaking skills as well as autonomous learning and learner motivation. Meanwhile, it is recommended that teachers must have the knowledge and skills to use the new digital tools and resources to help all students achieve high academic standards in speaking.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Oral expression, Speaking skills, teaching, learning.

Intégration des TIC dans l'amélioration des compétences d'expression orale des apprenants: potentiels et limites

Résumé

La présente étude traite la manière dont les TIC peuvent être utilisées efficacement dans l'enseignement supérieur pour améliorer les compétences en matière de communication des apprenants de l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Comme l'anglais aujourd'hui est considéré comme une lingua franca, la compétence de parler est devenue une importance primordiale à acquérir. Ce travail de recherche met l'accent sur les potentiels et les limites de l'intégration des TIC dans l'enseignement de l'expression orale pour les étudiants de deuxième année anglais à l'Université de Hamma Lakhdar, El-oued, en Algérie. Le but de cette recherche est d'étudier, d'interpréter et d'analyser les méthodes utilisées par les enseignants afin de renforcer les compétences en anglais des élèves et de fournir des suggestions pour utiliser les TIC de façon plus productive pour améliorer principalement leurs compétences en matière de parole. Cette recherche met également en lumière les difficultés rencontrées par les enseignants pour intégrer ces technologies dans l'enseignement de l'expression orale. En cherchant à atteindre les objectifs de l'étude, deux questionnaires ont été administrés aux étudiants et aux enseignants. Cinq (05) enseignants ont

expérimenté l'enseignement de l'expression orale ainsi que vingt (20) élèves de deuxième année anglais choisis au hasard. L'étude a été menée au cours de l'année académique 2017/2018 au Département d'anglais, l'Université de Hamma Lakhdar à El-Oued, en Algérie. Les résultats de cette étude montrent que les TIC sont directement bénéfiques pour améliorer les compétences linguistiques des apprenants ainsi que l'apprentissage autonome et la motivation de l'apprenant. Pendant ce temps, il est recommandé que les enseignants aient les connaissances et les compétences nécessaires pour utiliser les nouveaux outils et ressources numériques pour aider tous les élèves à atteindre des normes académiques élevées en parlant.

Mots–clés: Technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC), Expression orale, Habiletés parlantes, Enseignement, Apprentissage.

Introduction

The popularity of ICT over the past decade has brought about the innovative use of technology-based tools in second and foreign language teaching and learning, mainly in the area of English as a second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL). Obviously, Information Communication Technology has changed the language learning and literacy acquisition environment as well as the dynamics of the language learning settings.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is seen as critical element that has shifted educational goals from knowledge acquisition to aspects and ways that produce the development of attitudes and intellectual capabilities as well as of further assimilation of knowledge (Athanasios & Fani: 04).

The branch of education has been affected by ICT. Student learning possibilities are further enhanced when the employment of an ICT tool such as a DVD or an email is a daily component of their lesson. ICT has the potential to innovate, accelerate, enrich and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, to help relate school experience to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow' s workers, as well as strengthening teaching and helping schools change (Syed: 02). It is the teacher's responsibility once again to make an effort and get liberated from the fear of ICT use in order to achieve a

thriving and praiseworthy outcome for foreign language learning (Athanasios & Fani, 2019: 4).

Conventional teaching has emphasized content. For many years course have been written around textbooks. Teachers have taught through lectures and presentations interspersed with tutorials and learning activities designed to consolidate and rehearse the content. Contemporary settings are now favoring curricula that promote competency and performance. Curricula are starting to emphasize capabilities and to be concerned more with how the information will be used than with what the information is. Contemporary ICTs are able to provide strong support for all these requirements and there are now many outstanding examples of world class settings for competency and performance-based curricula that make sound use of the affordances of these technologies (Oliver, 2000). The integration of information and communication technologies can help revitalize teachers and students. This can help to improve and develop the quality of education by providing curricular support in difficult subject areas, as oral expression. To achieve these objectives, the present study discusses how ICT can be used effectively in tertiary education to enhance speaking skills of the EFL learners. As English today is regarded as a lingua franca, the skill of speaking has become one of paramount significance to acquire. This research work puts the spot light on the potentials and limitations of integrating ICT in teaching oral

expression for the students of second year English at the University Echahid Hamma Lakhdar, El-Oued, Algeria.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate, interpret and analyze the methods used by teachers in order to enhance students' English skills and to provide suggestions as how to use ICTs more productively to enhance mainly their speaking skills. It also sheds light on the difficulties encountered by teachers in integrating those technologies in teaching oral expression. Specific questions explored in the study include the following:

— What are teachers' and students' perceptions towards the use of ICT in English classes ?

— What are the benefits and/or difficulties with the use of ICT in the teaching of English speaking skills ?

— Can integrating ICT in oral expression sessions enhance students' speaking proficiency ?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition(s) of ICT

In its wider sense, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) includes computers, the Internet, and electronic delivery systems such as radios, and projectors among others, and is widely used in today' s education field (Jo Shan, 2013: 112).

According to Daniels (2002) ICTs have become within a very short time, one of the basic building blocks of modern society. Many countries now regard understanding ICT and mastering the basic skills and concepts of ICT as part of the core of education, alongside reading, writing and numeracy.

However, there appears to be a misconception that ICTs generally refers to 'computers and computing related activities'. This is fortunately not the case, although computers and their application play a significant role in modern information management, other technologies and systems also comprise of the phenomenon that is commonly regarded as ICTs. In the same context, Pelgrum and Law (2003) state that near the end of the 1980s, the term 'computers' was replaced by 'IT' (information technology) signifying a shift of focus from computing technology to the capacity to store and retrieve information. This was followed by the introduction of the term 'ICT' (information and communication technology) around 1992, when e-mail started to become available to the general public (Pelgrum, W.J., Law, N., 2003). According to a United Nations report (1999) ICTs cover Internet service provision, telecommunications equipment and services, information technology equipment and services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centers, commercial information providers, network-based information services, and other related information and communication activities (Cited in Syed, 2015: 1 - 2).

From the UNESCO (2002) viewpoint, information and communication technology (ICT) may be viewed as the combination of 'Informatics technology' with other related technology, specifically communication technology. The various kinds of ICT products available and having relevance to

education, such as teleconferencing, email, audio conferencing, television lessons, radio broadcasts, interactive radio counseling, interactive voice response system, audiocassettes and CD ROMs etc have been used in education for different purposes (Sharma, 2003; Sanyal, 2001; Bhattacharya, 2007).

2.2. The Benefits of Integrating ICT in EFL Classes

The use of ICT in EFL classes have a various benefits. The merits of ICT include:

- **Produce a creative learning environment** as it develops learners' understanding in different areas of learning. It also provides more creative solutions to different types of learning inquiries. For instance, in oral expression class, video tapes and records are commonly used in listening and speaking activities. Hence, ICT involves purpose-designed applications that provide innovative ways to meet a variety of learning needs.

- **Support student-centered and self-directed learning**,

ICT enhances autonomous learning. Based on learning through ICT, students build new knowledge via accessing, selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. Thanks to ICT, learners become capable of utilizing data from various sources, meanwhile assessing the quality of the learning materials (Brush, Glazewski and Hew, 2008).

- **Promote collaborative learning in distance-learning environment**, since using ICT enables learners to communicate, share, and work collaboratively. For example, a teleconferencing classroom could invite students from different

regions to gather together simultaneously for a topic discussion, analyzing problems, or exploring ideas and concepts (Koc, 2005).

- Support teaching by facilitating access to course content, instructors can act as catalysts for the integration of technology through ICT. Reid (2002) has indicated, ICT offers students more time to explore beyond the mechanics of course content allowing them to better understand concepts. Therefore, ICT changes the traditional teacher centered approach, and requires teachers to be more creative in customizing and adapting their own material.

2.3 The Impact of Integrating ICT in the Teaching/ Learning Process

ICT has affected the field of education that has undoubtedly affected teaching and learning (Yusuf, 2005). The Internet, as the main tool of ICT, has the potential to provide a new learning environment that has rich digital textual, graphic, audio, video, and other interactive features for the language learning approach as well as for culture (Muehleisen, 1997 In Young, 2003: 448). The Internet is considered a key factor in enhancing the learners' motivation for both language learning and language proficiency (Lee, 2000 In Young 2003: 448).

Recently, language teachers have been exploiting ways in which ICT can be employed to make language learning more effective and motivating for students. English language teachers have to consider how to teach language literacy and

technological skills so that learners can make effective use of ICT. In developing and implementing an electronic literacy approach, teachers should address a number of key questions:

(1) How should English language teachers make the best use of ICT to maximize language study and practice ?

(2) What strategies of communicating and networking should students be taught ?

(3) How can teachers encourage students to become autonomous learners who can continue to learn how to communicate, conduct research and present their ideas using ICT ?

As far as students at the Department of English Language and Literature at the University Echahid Hamma Lakhdar, El-Oued, Algeria are concerned, the researchers noticed that the majority of the students lack competency in English speaking and listening skills. Much importance are given to reading and writing skills in tests and exams. However, with the dawn of the ICT era, the concept of language learning has been revolutionized . In this vein, Stephen Krashen states that:

> Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill […] Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. In the real world, conversations

with sympathetic native speakers who are willing

to help the acquirer understand are very

helpful.(Rathnasena et al 2013:21).

2.4 ICT and Teaching English Speaking Skills

Speaking is of key significance for English language students to acquire. In this context, ICT, if appropriately used, could play a crucial role in rising students' speaking proficiency.

It is essential to integrate ICT in teaching oral expression as it brings the real world into classrooms. The benefits of implementing ICT in oral expression sessions can be summarized in the following brief notes:

(1) It offers both teachers and learners a wide range of authentic materials of the target language.

(2) ICT motivates students to develop their speaking skills.

(3) It bridges the target language culture with the teaching and learning process.

The integration of ICT in teaching and learning speaking skills requires adopting effective teaching techniques to help students enhance their speaking proficiency. For instance, teachers can use CD-ROMs (Compact Disk Read –Only Memory) or DVDs (Digital Versatile Disk) to teach speaking skills. CD-ROMs together with DVDs have a positive impact on students' performance as they enabled students to be exposed to authentic language and to be autonomous learners. Thus, if the university or the school has a computer laboratory, teachers can program some oral expression sessions where students work

individually or in pairs on CD-ROMs materials. Also, during oral expression sessions, learners can listen to a short sections of a DVD dialogue several times, then their comprehension will be checked and evaluated.

Additionally, chatting, if it is well prepared, organized, and timed, can be useful in improving students' speaking proficiency. It is a crucial technique in improving learners' fluency and accuracy. When implementing chat technique, students may meet in pairs or in small groups via social media networks to discuss subjects dealt with in oral expression sessions.

3. Methodology

The study employed qualitative method aiming at interpreting and analyzing the data collected from students' and teachers' questionnaires.

3.1 Participants

Five (05) teachers experienced the teaching of oral expression in addition to twenty (20) students of second year English have been chosen randomly. The study was conducted during the academic year 2017/2018 at the Department of English, the University Hamma Lakhdar of El-Oued, Algeria.

The table below gives more details about the sample(s) of the study:

Table 1: The Sample(s) of the study.

Participants	Male	Female	Total Number
Teachers	03	02	05
Students	06	14	20

3.2 Data Gathering Tools

Seeking to achieve the aims of the study, two questionnaires were administered to both students and teachers.

Teachers' questionnaire is composed of two parts: The first part is dedicated to the demographic and background information of the respondents (age, gender, work experience, experience of teaching the subject of oral expression). Respondents were asked to tick in the appropriate choice. The second part is composed of three (03) sections: The first section is devoted to teachers' perceptions towards the use of ICT in English classes. It consists of six (06) items. Respondents were asked to tick in the appropriate choice (s) or to provide other answers. The second section is concerned with the benefits and difficulties encountered when using ICT in the teaching of English speaking skills. It comprises six (06) items where teachers are asked to tick in the appropriate choice (s) or to provide other answers. The third and the last section is concerned with ways and methods adopted by teachers to improve learners' English language speaking proficiency.

Students' questionnaire was designed to collect the information from twenty (20) second year English students to find out how they employed different ICT tools to improve their

speaking skills, their opinions about the problems they face in the learning of speaking skills and their suggestions to improve the effectiveness of oral expression sessions.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The findings of the study revealed that both teachers and students had favorable attitudes towards ICT and its positive impact on the teaching and learning process. Most teachers believed that ICT should be a supplement to teaching foreign languages. Additionally, there was a favorable response relating to motivational aspects delivered through the use of technology. The five (05) teachers asserted that the use of ICT motivated the students to study by themselves. Moreover, most students (16 out of 20) felt that ICT could enhance their speaking proficiency.

The data obtained from teachers and students questionnaires shows that the utilizing of ICT in oral expression developed students' language speaking skills better than in-class-only teaching. ICT reinforces and expands oral expression syllabus and classroom activities, thus providing students with opportunities to revisit activities and tasks. It also enhances the speaking skills they have already achieved. It also motivates students to study autonomously and spend more time engaging in the English language to improve their language speaking proficiency.

Although ICT has several merits as perceived by both teachers and students, barriers or challenges associated with its

use still exist. Obstacles to effective technology integration from a teacher perspective include: (1) low teacher expectations and a lack of clear goals for ICT use in education; (2) a lack of teacher collaboration and pedagogical support; (3) limited knowledge and experience of ICT in teaching contexts; (4) a lack of in-service training on the use of ICT; and (5) a lack of specific knowledge about technology and how to combine it with the existing pedagogical content to support students' learning.

Finally, teachers voiced a lot of concerns about classroom management when using ICT in classroom. With this new technologies the teacher needed to prepare up-to-date digitized teaching materials and should respond to students' questions via email in a timely way. Preparing a network sessions accompanied with taking care of the after class online activities required much time on the part of teachers.

5. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

The findings revealed that both teachers and students have not been using ICT to its maximum, thus not reaching the optimum potential in speaking. Practicing speaking via ICT strengthens learners' autonomy and leads them to be confident and competent communicators in English. This is what proves the effectiveness of integrating ICT into the teaching and learning of oral expression.

This research work ends up with recommendations to direct both teachers and students towards the best ways of implementing ICT in the teaching and learning of speaking skills. It is agreed upon that the incorporation of ICT in EFL classes is the trend nowadays, however universities and schools should not jump on the ICT wagon. Rather it is highly suggested that the policies concerning curriculum and syllabus design, pedagogy, and the whole university supporting systems in the peer-teacher community and logistic services should be updated and reinforced (Young 2003: 459-460).

In order to remove the obstacles facing both teachers and students in incorporating ICT in English language teaching and learning, the following suggestions are highly recommended:

(1) Provide professional development activities related to technology to update teachers' skills and knowledge, and offer technical support when needed.

(2) Organizing training sessions for English language teachers centered around the technical use of ICTs in corporation with computing teachers.

(3) Organizing study days on implementing mobile learning in English language teaching and learning targeting English language teachers and students.

(4) In collaboration with the central libarary of the university, a training sessions should be provided to English language teachers on how to upload content courses on the university digital blatform.

(5) The University administration should provide the necessary logistic support to the teachers. It should guarantee providing technical support in addition to putting all university facilities and professionals in the service of both teachers and students.

(6) Enhance positive attitudes about the significance of integrating ICT into oral expression instruction.

Conclusion

ICT has been used in educational settings since its inception, but recent empirical research has affirmed that it plays a vital role in high-quality learning and teaching. Such research insights have shown that advances in technology have opened up new possibilities for the way in which teachers educate their classes, giving potential for innovative ways to encourage students to become more engaged in their schooling. To enable the best possible outcomes for their students, it is vital that schools are able to keep up with this progress.

Although developing communicative skills is at the heart of foreign language learning, the most fundamental cornerstone of EFL learning is speaking skills. In this context, English teachers should adopt appropriate pedagogical strategies and activities to meet the desired educational objectives. They should adapt strategies to combine ICT usage with English language teaching to improve learners' speaking abilities.

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