



EFL Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of ICT in the Tinghir Province (Morocco)

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Abstract

To address the educational challenges of the new millennium, the Moroccan Ministry of Education issued the National Charter for Education in 1999. The 10th article treats the integration of ICT in the public education system and supports the acquisition of computers for schools plus the promotion of distance education and learning. In the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), using ICT materials and resources would be an invaluable asset for the learning process—guided or independent. As part of a larger observational study, we interviewed 40 teachers of Middle School and Secondary education in the Tinghir Province (southeastern Morocco). We focused on the actual opportunities to integrate ICT in their EFL lessons, the advantages and inconvenience of the process, and any suggestions they could make to improve the current situation.

Keywords: ICT, integration, advantages, inconveniences, teacher training, student motivation

1. Introduction

Since Morocco gained independence in the late 1950s, the interest in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has increased steadily [1]. Given the global reach of English nowadays, the Moroccan government and private sectors know well the importance of encouraging the use and study of the language widely, if Moroccans are to succeed in the sphere of international communication, have an adequate professional development, and deal with the latest advances and technological devices [2]. In this scenario, using ICT in state-held schools, and as part of the students' learning process—guided or independent—would be an invaluable asset for the learners' progress and their adult lives [3,4]. As a result, and to address the educational challenges of the new millennium, the Moroccan Ministry of Education issued the *National Charter for Education* in 1999, whose 10th article speaks of the integration of ICT in the public education system and supports “the acquisition of computing facilities at schools with the promotion of distance education and learning” [5]. However, nowadays the Moroccan Ministry of Education is still looking for solutions and private-public partnerships to start pilot projects that can facilitate the gradual incorporation of ICT for information sharing, communication and technological applications, as well as to “foster democracy and moralization of public life using ICT as the major tool” [5].

1.2 Study design, data collection and instruments

Observing language classrooms and the contextual elements that may determine their development is one of the common methods for research in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) [6]. Accordingly, we performed a three-stage observational study—consisting of questionnaires, interviews and video recordings, in this order—between June and September 2014. The study includes 40 participants, all of them EFL teachers that work at 18 state-held centres (Middle School and Secondary education levels) in the Tinghir Province, southeastern Morocco. Due to their active involvement in ELT, these teachers seemed ideal candidates to get some insight into the topic from a realistic and practical viewpoint.

In this paper, we concentrate on the second stage of the study, the interview process, on account of its relevance to broaden our knowledge on the actual role of ICT in language learning in this geographic area. During the first stage, we passed round a questionnaire among the participants to find out which materials and resources were available in their EFL classrooms, how they were used in practice to develop the four major skills, and which experience and/or training the teachers had for the

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purpose. To learn more about the actual opportunities these EFL teachers had to implement ICT in their lessons, as well as about other aspects related to teachers' training and learners' motivation, the second stage consisted of a semi-structured interview that combined grand-tour type questions and planned prompts. These allowed us to have further details and elicit new relevant information.

1.3 Results

Of the five major topics tackled in the interviews, three of them revolved around ICT and the formal learning of EFL in the Tinghir Province; namely: a) the possibility of integrating ICT in the EFL lessons at present, how easy or difficult it was, and the high or low frequency of use; b) the advantages vs. inconvenience of using ICT in (high)school environments; and c) any suggestions that they, as active players in the EFL teaching-learning process, could give to improve the current situation.

1.3.1 Opportunities to integrate ICT in EFL classes

Most teachers think that the integration of ICT in any modern education center is, of course, highly recommendable, yet the scarcity of materials and resources they face daily—especially, of computers with Internet connection, LCD projectors or TV sets—makes it hard to achieve. Some teachers bring their own laptops to class and spend part of their wages to provide for the lack of teaching materials and resources, but having access to the Internet is unusual. Alternatively, the teachers often work with cassette players to comply with the national guidelines as much as they can manage.

Regarding the frequency of ICT use, the few teachers having LCD projectors in place often employ them to practice listening skills, but just once or twice a month due to space and organization restrictions. Others, from time to time, project an exercise on the blackboard to be done by students, introduce contents supported by PowerPoint slides, or make students visualize thematic videos in group to revise concepts.

State-held Middle and Secondary education centers in Morocco allow 3h/week to English language subjects. Most teachers agree that this is not enough to teach all contents required to pass certification exams. For this reason, they reckon that ICT materials could be a handicap because the preparation and implementation in such unfavourable circumstances can be time-consuming for both parties.

1.3.2 Advantages vs. inconvenience of ICT

Linked to the above, we asked the teachers to be more specific about the positive and negative sides of using ICT at formal education environments, bearing in mind how it could influence on the lessons, the students and other aspects. Their ideas are summarized in Table 1 below.

Advantages	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Innovative approaches to language teaching can be applied. ○ More opportunities for creativity are given. ○ Language can be contextualized and presented realistically. ○ Non-verbal communication and paralinguistic elements can be explained as a component of language use. ○ Diversification and access to more reliable and comprehensive information sources are possible. ○ Students can be educated in the 21st-century global world. • For students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Active participation and willingness to respond are increased. ○ Motivation levels and involvement in the learning process is observed. ○ Native language (accentuation and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulty in integrating ICT in the lessons due to the curriculum and syllabuses in the state-held education system in Morocco. ○ Time-consuming. ○ Need to have great teacher control over web contents. • For students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Risk of self-isolation and tendency to avoid working collaboratively. ○ Unfavourable for very-low-income families (no access to a computer, not to speak of the Internet, so there is no continuity and no autonomous learning). • Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No adequate teacher training to incorporate ICT in the classroom. ○ No means to do it effectively (e.g. rooms have restricted access or are shared by all teachers at



<p>pronunciation) can be listened to in context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (Meta-)cognitive skills are worked on; concentration, collaboration and self-confidence are improved. ○ Linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive and cultural competencies can be developed. ○ Learning-to-learn and digital competencies are fostered. ○ Formative (preparing future teachers for the challenges in higher education). 	<p>school).</p>
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Table 1. Advantages and drawbacks to using ICT

1.3.3 Suggested improvements

Given the teachers' perceptions and opinions on the topic, we requested some suggestions and personal reflections that could improve the current situation on the ground. Some of them stressed the need for government intervention because, to have enough time for implementing ICT in EFL classes successfully, there should be an increase in the number of hours of instruction per week and reduce the student ratio per class. This way, Moroccan students at state-held (high)schools would benefit from more exposure to the EFL, thus being able to acquire competencies to integrate into a global world in which English is the *lingua franca* of international communication.

Moreover, some teachers demanded more official training courses for beginners and intermediate-users, as well as practical sessions to specialize in ICT for teaching purposes and develop their digital competency. And, with an eye on Moroccan university students pursuing a degree to become school teachers in the short term, the teachers interviewed highlighted the importance of being instructed adequately with updated information and interactive workshops on how to use ICT practically. Good results cannot be achieved if teachers themselves feel unprepared to play a role model for the students in Middle School and Secondary education levels. The most concerned teachers even told that, apart from incorporating ICT in the EFL classes, it is also imperative to start moving from a traditional teacher-centered methodology to a more student-centered one, by introducing different approaches and strategies that increase students' motivation for the subject and raise their curiosity about its applicability in the real world.

Lastly, most teachers believed that school infrastructures and facilities should be properly conditioned to have a good Internet connection and to accommodate computers, ICT materials and gadgets, audiovisual resources and multimedia. Each of these can offer EFL learners more chances to work on receptive and productive skills in simulated or real-life conditions. In fact, they consider that the teaching materials should be as authentic as possible to recreate the contexts and communicative situations in which the students may be eventually involved.

1.4 Concluding remarks

Thanks to the interviews, we could go further into the type of materials and resources available for the EFL classes in the Tinghir Province. The most traditional one, the textbook, is compulsory used in the lessons and is the perfect excuse for the more reluctant to incorporate ICT or audiovisual material into their daily teaching activity, either because it requires more extra effort outside normal working hours.

There are clashing views as to technology, as shown in Table 1 above. While some EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the integration of ICT in Middle School and Secondary education levels of the Tinghir Province, inasmuch as they reckon it is crucial to get exposed to authentic (native) language or may allow for skills integration in ELT, for example. Along the same lines, a group of teachers consider that the 21st-century students' vivid interest in technology and digitally-enhanced material could be an added bonus to make the most of ICT in the classroom; if used properly, ICT could also contribute to developing (meta-)cognitive, social and integrative skills. However, other teachers find the implementation of ICT virtually impossible due to the poor infrastructure and the reduced amount of technological devices at hand in certain (high)schools. In any stance, all EFL teacher participants coincide in the need of continuous training, updating and recycling so that they



can serve as good role models for their own students; otherwise, incorporating ICT into the EFL lessons may be counterproductive.

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