

Using Smart Boards, Mobile Phones, and Skype to Teach English as a Second/Foreign Language in Lebanon

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Abstract: *The use of modern technology has become an indispensable tool to enhance the language teaching processes, which has constituted a significant part of teachers' profession. Students these days are computer and Internet savvy; hence, they not only have good access to modern technologies, but they also use them with ease for many purposes, including education. According to recent studies, smart boards, mobile phones, and Skype play a significant role in enhancing the development of English learning proficiency (Waker, 2001, Cennamo, Ross, and Ertmer 2010). These easily accessible devices and platforms have greatly altered how people communicate with each other in education in an interesting and useful manner (Meenakshi, & Santhosh, 2015, p. 2). In this regard, it is essential for educationalists and curriculum designers to embrace the latest and innovative technologies into their classrooms, as it is vital for learners. Furthermore, teachers should help students make use of the available technology to make the learning environment attractive, interesting and more vibrant. Therefore, it is high time that educators integrated these effective and efficient tools into the Lebanese curriculum in order to catch up with the developing world and equip their students with the right tools to fit in a world that is primarily dependent on technical innovations. This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of utilizing these devices and platforms in the teaching of English in certain Lebanese schools. It examines how smart boards can be used to teach English at the elementary level, how mobile phones can be integrated at the intermediate level, and how Skype can be utilized at the secondary/senior level.*

Keywords: Lebanese schools, technology, smart board, mobile phones, Skype, blended learning, ESL/EFL

1. Introduction

The growth of the Communication and Information Technology (CIT) and the widespread use of social networking have surely affected all areas of life and mainly the field of education in an interesting and useful manner (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). The use of these technologies has become an important part of the learning process as they offer unlimited resources and rapid information to language learners (Bull & Ma, 2001). They have also brought significant benefits to the process of language learning that could be aligned with various strategic educational goals such as improving students' retention and achievement, supporting differentiation of learning needs, satisfying learners' visual and auditory senses, and reaching learners who don't have the opportunity to participate in education (Hashemi, 2014). In Lebanon, technology has become the main interest of the young generation and has led educators towards new approaches in the teaching learning process. Many universities and schools in Lebanon took initiatives for gradually integrating technology into the scope of education. Furthermore, there have been few studies conducted in the Lebanese context to investigate the influence of using mobile phones, Skype and smart boards in improving learners of ESL (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). This study springs from the fact that it has the potential to provide both teachers and students with new horizons for practice and exposure to English language. The researchers, in general, aim to make an analysis of the modern English language teaching methodology and, in particular, discuss how language teachers can use smart boards, mobiles, and Skype in the EFL classroom. Thus, in an attempt to motivate students and improve their English communication skills, one important opportunity, at a time when technology plays

such a prominent role in our lives, is for instructors to redesign their traditional courses to accommodate and comply with the growing expectations in a technologically based world. According to a Lebanese English language instructor, technology is a tool and not a solution (Hennessy, Ruthven & Brindley, 2005). It can never replace a good teacher; it can only enhance, augment, and extend teachers' skills and abilities if it is well integrated. Most importantly, infusing technology should be examined from the lens of how teachers adopt the technological devices productively to existing classroom activities and how such adoption may restructure the curriculum needs. Without affecting the course schedule and the teaching load, successful technology integration can enhance course quality teaching (Mandell, Sorge, & Russell, 2002) and aid students in achieving more authentic goals in communication, collaboration and problem solving (Ertmer, 1999). Furthermore, it can improve students' learning processes and performances in the classroom (Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002). On the other hand, researchers such as Cennamo, Ross, and Ertmer (2010); Cuban (2001), posited that there is no guarantee that educational problems could be solved automatically just by incorporating technology into classroom settings. Besides, technology will have no real impact on the teaching and learning process if the teacher does not have a thorough understanding of its value and application within the curriculum and to the lessons in the classroom (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010; B. Su, 2009). To overcome such obstacles, language teachers should receive proper training and professional development to support the curriculum and increase the true use of it in the learning process. Without clear overarching goals and underpinning reasons, teachers will not be able to incorporate technology into daily lessons.

It becomes an extra, ornamental and irrelevant work, hence supporting neither teaching nor learning (Cuban, 1998).

2. Literature Review

Using technology in the classroom has become an essential part in the teaching- learning processes because technology, with its diverse application, has the ability to facilitate students' learning. Various studies have been conducted to study the efficacy of integrating technology into education. Most of them have yielded positive results (Hennessy, Ruthven & Brindley, 2005). Many researchers have found that when materials and resources are properly designed for incorporating technology, they could enhance students' learning, foster interaction, and add joy to the class (Rooney, 2003; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Furthermore, well designed materials help students gain more understanding of the subject matter and develop their cognitive and social skills at the same time. Professionals and educators face challenges of integrating traditional and emerging technology as to balance various learning styles (Graham, 2006). Such a paradigm shift is considered a challenge for many teachers/ instructors at school or in higher education due to the lack of technical and administrative support as well as lack of awareness on technology integration. At the same time, the increasing presence of technology has changed students' behavior, attitudes, performance, and has altered the manner in which they learn and communicate in and out of class (Graham, 2006). For example, computers, smart phones, tablets, and online games have diminished the students' attention span and distracted them from retaining information.

However, Roblyer and Doering (2009) argued for the significance behind using technology as to build up a sound rationale and justifications for technology integration. By using technology in the classroom, students can easily and quickly address prior knowledge to understand new concepts. Warschauer (2000) described two different views about how to integrate technology into the class. First, in the cognitive approach, learners get the opportunity to increase their exposure to language meaningfully and make their own knowledge. Second, in the social approach, learners must be given opportunities for authentic social interactions to practice real life skills. This objective can be obtained through the collaboration of learners in real activities.

An essential purpose behind technology integration is to engage students in meaningful learning when it is well-planned and used for curriculum activities (Löfström & Nevgi, 2006). In the context of online settings, Rovai (2004) believed that learners do not passively accept information but they build on their increasing understanding of the study subject via experience and interaction with other individuals and environments. Thus, meaningful learning together with technology integration provides activities that could foster learners' dialogue, reflection, collaboration, connection to context, and transferring of knowledge (Löfström & Nevgi, 2006).

Over the last decade, foreign language learners show no interest toward the traditional ways and methods of teaching and learning. Learners end up being unmotivated and get

reluctant to participate in class activities. Such a serious problem can easily disrupt the instructional process (Harmer, 2007). However, today's students learn in ways that are different from how their parents learnt, or even from how they learnt themselves several years ago. Professionals are looking through 21st century devices for introducing new methods of not only teaching but also motivating students to learn a foreign language (FL). They are motivated to restructure the learning process and adjust their classroom material to accommodate such change, or else lectures will appear tedious to most students. Besides, having a mixture of students with different learning preferences and styles necessitates using multiple modalities for learning in order to deliver the right content in the right form. It is time that higher education complies with the growing expectations to help students adapt effectively in such a technologically based world. Furthermore, the process of educating students has started to shift from merely teaching, where the teacher is the only source of knowledge, into a teaching-learning process where students and teachers are active participants in this process. Teachers who would like to adapt the constructive approach, where students are actively engaged and acquire more knowledge, can do this by integrating information and communication technologies (ICI) into education. Thus, in an attempt to motivate students and improve their English skills, one important opportunity, at a time when technology plays such a prominent role in our lives, is for instructors to redesign their traditional courses using a blended model, mobile phones, Skype and smart boards (Singh, 2003).

3. Present Trends in Teaching English

3.1 Blended Learning

The advancement in information communication technology (ICT) has changed how people communicate with each other in both society and the business world. At the secondary level, it has changed how students and academics gain access to information. Academics no longer need to carry a pile of books or print out dozens of handouts to lecture. Thus, it is necessary to improve the academic quality in different Lebanese academic institutions by creating new educational methods with technological devices and platforms (Graham, 2006). Otherwise, it would be outdated and students might face an ever changing environment that demands various abilities and capabilities. Technology does not affect teaching positively all the time while, face-to-face learning is also not the perfect way of teaching. A method that may provide a balance in teaching is semi-attendance-based learning, known as blended learning (BL). This teaching method is based on the synergy of traditional teaching with tactics that are characteristic of non-attendance-based distance learning or E-learning that enhances language teaching (Marsh & McFadden, 2005). Recently, researchers have addressed the importance of acquiring language by social and efficient acquisition more than being developed by cognition and memorization (Brown & Brown, 2014, p.32). Ward and LaBranche (2003) claimed that blended learning is often labeled as "the best of both worlds". It is the process of F2F learning mixed with practical use of technology or online activities. BL is not just about finding the right mix of technologies or simply

increasing students access to content in a new medium. It is inherently about rethinking and redesigning the teaching and learning relationship (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). For successful blended classes, a complete redesign of teaching methods is required in order to create meaningful and engaging integration between in-class and online learning.

The notion of using technology in general and smart boards, mobile phones, and Skype, in particular, has been widely accepted due to its many benefits. But when searching through available research reports, very few studies in the Arab countries and Lebanon have been done to support such a belief. In Lebanon, however, the concept of integrating or blending any course does exist but its full implementation is still an option. This could be due to restrictive rules and regulation in licensing any online program. The Lebanese government still does not approve any form of online degree as an equivalent to traditional degrees. Despite this fact, many Lebanese universities such as (American university of Beirut AUB, Lebanese American University LAU, Beirut Arab University BAU...) offer online or blended classes that are accredited by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (LMEHE). However, it is still not officially approved as a degree by the ministry of education. Some of the reasons might be due to the lack of control over students cheating, lack of awareness about online/blended education, lack of administrative and technical support, limited internet coverage, frequent electric power cut, personal anxiety with technology and online teaching, and finally inadequate pedagogical skills for online teaching (Khazen, 2014, Rooney, 2003; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

3.2 Interactive Smart Board (ISB)

Smart board is one of the technological items that has emerged in 1999. Recently, ISB has been massively introduced to some Lebanese schools provided an infinite number of resources to the English language classroom. It has been introduced in classrooms as a replacement for the traditional blackboard. Nowadays, it is used in teaching different subject matters displayed in an accessible manner, lectures halls, and language labs especially at the elementary level. It is considered a perfect tool especially for the elementary level since it combines all the previous teaching aids such as white board chalks, cassette recorders, television, CD player, overhead projector, and computer in one. Elementary teachers and students use their finger, special electronic pen (stylus), pointer or a pen to operate the board and/or control computer icons. Through this versatile tool, teachers in some Lebanese schools took advantage of this in order to bring the outside world inside the classroom through plethora of multimedia materials (Walker, 2002). As technology integrated with education, teachers can incorporate videos, images and other graphics while delivering their lessons. They can also go through some related websites, programs and apps to make changes in their teaching methods and provide useful and reliable material to their learners. Interactive products provided elementary students with visual and auditory learning materials by using different pictures/visual materials, sense of hearing by using various sound effects and conducting group session; and kinesthetic receptor by using touch. Al-Saleem's (2012) explained how such a tool could be of a

great support to elementary students through editing the text and pictures, taking notes in a digital through smart boards, short recordings of voice are created to practice pronunciation, vocabulary or word order.

The use of the smart board for instruction serves as a catalyst for the change from traditional instructional methods to the interactive and constructivist methods. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of autonomous learning and higher order thinking skills especially at the elementary level. It is interactive and great for demonstration (Warschauer & Meskill 2000). This tool helped some teachers in Lebanon utilize various media such as text, voice, pictures, and movies that facilitate more effective learning, even in routine practice activities (Ernist, 2004). On the other hand, other research indicated that the entry of technology into the classroom and, mainly smart board, is not sufficient to raise the level of students' interactivity. Thus, a complete redesign of pedagogical practices is required in the light of new instructional and media choices. Pedagogies must be rich and redesigned to improve student's learning. When confident teachers are willing to explore new opportunities for changing their classroom practices by utilizing technology, this will not only enhance learning environments but also prepare next generation for future lives and careers (Wheeler, 2001).

3.3 Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are considered as one of the most pervasive means of communication that can be extended far beyond the classroom setting due to their portability, utility, and connectivity (Samsiah et al., 2013). They have become very popular and inseparable part among Lebanese schools. The use of these devices have been the subject of discussions and debate for many studies in order to explore their implications and advantageous on the teaching of English classes in Lebanon. The wide spread of this handy device in particular has various benefits and implications on students' language proficiency. In education, they have made learners' day to day task easier and faster. Besides, they have provided easy access on relevant information and on broad range of educational activities to foster learning transformation. They are cheap tools compared to other ICTs. They have larger screens, variety of application, audio and video recording software. Due to internet connectivity and learning applications in phones, EFL teachers in some Lebanese schools had to innovate new materials and adjust their teaching methods to enhance learners' simulation, virtual experiences, and graphic representations. Studies have shown that the use of mobile devices do bring positive impacts in improving English language proficiency such as watching online tutorial, reading material, and listening to English records based on their pace (Banister, 2010 and Coates, D. & Humphreys 2004). They help the digital natives or tech-savvy students to access web based contents, remix them, share them, collaborate with others, store and retrieve information as well as record and play multimedia contents (Prensky, 2001). The use of mobile applications in teaching, as stated by Kurtz (2012) could offer opportunities to learn interactively through different platforms. In other words, it could facilitate not only learning contents conveniently but also interacting with other students

collaboratively anytime and anywhere (Hunsu, Adesope & Bayly, 2016). The following are some practical engagement of using mobile phones used by intermediate teachers in some Lebanese schools (Ferry, 2009):

- 1) *Note-taking and Memory*: students are trained to take notes on what they hear outside the class or read inside the class like hunting for specific language forms to break the boundary between class time and daily activities.
- 2) *Photographing and Recording*: students take pictures of English texts, collect language samples from TV, make a voice memo, design a project based video task which combines drama, technology, and communicative language teaching. This helps them realize the topic with more enthusiasm and break the monotony of traditional class teaching.
- 3) *Text Messaging*: students are encouraged to text words covered in class to increase retention and improve their writing skills.
- 4) *Social Networking*: through the use of a wide range of social networking, students are asked to report on their daily activities through Facebook. They send messages, share pictures, or interact online in different ways. This meaningful interaction promotes students' engagement and will gear them towards experiential teamwork and task solving activities.

Introducing mobile phones at the intermediate level to teach English is highly recommended in terms of exploring and sharing learning contents (Ferry, 2009). They offer great potential for student's interaction and practice with authentic communicative language functions. They are used to broaden learning opportunities and consolidate autonomous learning (Jacobs, 2013). Many Lebanese teachers have found it a worthwhile investment of their time especially at the intermediate level (Al-Jaraf, 2006).

3.4 Skype

Skype is an influential computer-mediated communication tool that provides video chat and voice messages in the most comfortable and interactive environment (Branzburgh, 2007). It is completely free of charge and doesn't cost schools/universities any other payments. It bridges the gap between classroom walls and real life experiences (Wand, 2007). Some Lebanese teachers consider it as a powerful resource for language teaching at the secondary level if used for well-defined learning objectives (Walker, Davies & Hewer, 2012).

At some Lebanese schools, English teachers use Skype as a platform to enhance students' language by sending instant messages, sending videos and or by creating conference calls exchanging files (Markton, 2014). Through Skype, senior Lebanese learners are also given the chance to contact and share ideas with experts. For instance, instructors/students can find experts in various fields of study including those who are native speakers. It helps them cherish intercultural understanding and builds links between classrooms/students all around the world. Secondary language teachers in Lebanon sometimes struggle to help learners speak a foreign language accurately. For this purpose, they are asked to prepare songs, videos and movies

that are uttered by native speakers of the language taught. Such a tool enables Lebanese learners to get the potential of international connection and to know more about the world. Students can build their vocabulary, improve speaking and listening practice through Skype. Roa (2007) and Coates & Humphreys (2004) stated some of the advanced features that make it useful for teaching English include:

- 1) *Conference calls*: Language teacher transfers data among members of a group through video calls or regular calls. Skype mainly saves time and reduces the cost of education. (Cough, 2006).
- 2) *Instant messaging or chat*: Teachers communicate through audio and video calls with students. If the connection breaks up, students communicate through messaging. This makes it useful for ESL/EFL who finds writing easier than speaking (Wand, 2007 and Gao, 2015).
- 3) *Screen/file Sharing*: It is one of the most features of Skype sharing. Students share a portion of the screen or the entire screen with other students on the call. They are trained to discuss their homework or record calls then listen/watch the audio or video later of complex points for further clarification that were not clear during the time of conversation (Gao, 2015). This could develop cooperative learning among students.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

Schools and university administrators should shift or blend the teaching methodologies as an extension of the regular classrooms. The net generation, as a young tech savvy group familiar with technology and are of its regular users, prefer technology driven learning style. However, there has been some cogent criticism and challenges for the integration of mobile phones, Skype, and smart board in the language classes. Some practical suggestions are presented to meet the concerns of curriculum designers and decision makers, English teachers, supervisors, education policy makers, and educators. In the light of previous studies, the researchers recommend the following:

4.1 Methods of Teaching

English language teachers are recommended to change the methods and approaches of teaching from traditional to the blend which is based on the students' real involvement. It is of great importance to help students use the English language in "life-like" situations through Skype, chatting forums, mobiles text messaging and blogs (Mooij, 2007). This teaching transformation changes their role from instructors who dominate the class into educators whose role is to facilitate, guide, coordinate and support students to communicate.

4.2 Infrastructure Facilities and Resources

The educational institutions are recommended to provide the needed infrastructure to use electronic learning in teaching. The key constituents of infrastructure and facilities include campuswide wireless networks, a technology rich learning commons and digital learning device (laptop/tablet/mobile) schemes for teaching staff and students. They are also recommended to provide instructors with instructional

materials which increase their awareness in modern trends of the teaching learning process (Marsh & McFadden, 2005).

4.3 Technical and Service Support

A team of dedicated technicians should always be available for students and the teaching staff. Not all students are adept at using technology for learning. Some students are not used to the self-responsibility that goes with learning material independently online. Breaking assignments down into smaller steps and providing reminders about upcoming due dates for assignments can help many students stay on task. Furthermore, Wi-Fi connectivity problems should be solved. Students and instructors will not be able to fully enjoy learning if there is a problem with Wi-Fi connection (Kurtz, 2012 and Nahum, 2013).

5. Conclusion

The application of technology represents a significant advance in contemporary English language teaching methods. Smart boards, mobile phones, and Skype provide entirely a novel experience for both the teachers and the students to make their work effective and meaningful. Teachers of English should not go on simply adding technology to make the learning environment effective and efficient. They should plan for the creative and efficient use of the latest innovative technologies as well as teaching techniques, methods in their classrooms to make the learners more active and energetic. That's why, a teacher with clear objectives is required, a teacher who knows the curriculum and effective instructional strategies, and can also give students engaging learning experiences to relate to their prior knowledge (Karal, Cebi & Turgut, 2011). When students can relate what they are learning to real life and personalize it, they become more intrinsically motivated. Hence, English language teachers should always encourage their learners positively to use mobile phones, Skype or smart boards in their classrooms to make teaching-learning process a fruitful one. This should provide students with unique learning opportunities where they receive deeper understanding of words, concepts, and skills. It is also about time that Lebanese schools start blending language classes with technology in order to catch up with the growing demands for both students and the workplace. Most importantly, teachers should play a key role in operating the different tools and teaching methods.

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