

The Significance of Integrating Technology in Teaching English at a Libyan Secondary School in Libya

Algwil, Kamila

Asmarya Islamic University- Faculty of Humanities

English Language Department

k.alghuwaili@asmarya.edu.ly

ORCID: [0000-0001-6318-7114](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6318-7114)

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions towards the integration of technology within the curriculum in terms of its significance and challenges. The aims of the present study are to investigate the benefits of using technology in teaching English and to find out the challenges that Libyan EFL teachers may face. Semi-structured interview and observation are used to collect data. The findings reveal that almost all Libyan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of technology in teaching as they indicate the benefits of technology integration in terms of developing the four skills, improving pronunciation, encouraging students to be independent learners, and enhancing learning as social participation. Although Libyan EFL teachers have awareness of the effectiveness of using technology within the curriculum, the findings indicate that Libyan EFL teachers face a number of challenges; they have limited time and wide curriculum, insufficient teaching aids, familiarity with traditional methods of teaching, students' low level in English language, and shortage in trained teachers.

الملخص

تركز هذه الدراسة على آراء مدرسي اللغة الانجليزية الليبيين في استخدام التكنولوجيا في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية من حيث فائدتها والصعوبات. تهدف هذه الدراسة للبحث في فائدة استخدام التكنولوجيا في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لطلبة المرحلة الثانوية واكتشاف الصعوبات التي يمكن أن تواجه المدرسين. أسئلة البحث هي لأي درجة مدرسي اللغة الانجليزية الليبيين لديهم إدراك بأهمية إدخال التكنولوجيا في التدريس وماهي الصعوبات التي يمكن أن تواجههم. الملاحظة والملاحظة استخدمت في هذه الدراسة لتجميع المعلومات. نتائج الدراسة هي أن التكنولوجيا تلعب دور كبير في تحسين تدريس اللغة الانجليزية من ناحية تطوير المهارات وتحسين النطق تشجيع الطلاب في الإعتماد على أنفسهم في التعلم. الصعوبات هي

الوعاء الزمني قصير مقارنة بطول المنهج. نقص في الوسائل التعليمية والتعود على الطرق القديمة في التدريس، ومستوى الطلبة في اللغة الانجليزية، ونقص في المدرسين ذوي الكفاءة العالية.

KEYWORDS: Technology integration, benefits, Libyan EFL teachers, English teaching, challenges

Introduction

There is a significant increase in the adoption of technology in the field of education in different parts of the world (Pradana, Rintaningrum, Kosov, Bloshenko, Rogova, & Singer, 2022). Technology integration is defined as the use of technology to support curriculum and create opportunities for students to learn language (Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri, 2017). Technology is an essential element of language teaching and learning. For instance, Ahmadi (2019) stated that technology is considered as an integral part of teaching and learning processes. It is very common to find language classrooms

equipped with the internet, computer, smart board, and sound system (Mafuraga, 2017). However, this is not always the case, especially in underdeveloped countries or countries which are in a post conflict stage.

Solanki and Shyamlee (2012) and Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri (2017) indicated that because of the widespread of the technology, the traditional teaching methods and traditional classrooms, where teachers stand in front of students and talk, give explanation and instruction should be changed. Similarly, Ahmadi (2018) pointed out that the teaching methods have been changed, and this is owing to the impact of the technology. According to Susikaran (2013), the teaching methods that rely on chalk and talk are insufficient to teach English. Therefore, Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri (2017) have stressed on the urgent need for teachers and students to have a reasonable knowledge with technology.

It is clear that there is an urgent need to integrate technology within the education system because the world develops every day. Many studies have focused on the effectiveness of integrating technology in the classroom, but a few of them have focused specifically on the Libyan EFL teachers who

teach English to secondary school students in the Libyan context. Therefore, this study focuses on the perceptions of Libyan EFL teachers towards the integration of technology in teaching English language, the challenges, and the reasons behind those challenges.

Research questions

The research questions are:

- 1) To what extent are Libyan EFL teachers aware of the significance of integrating technology in EFL classroom?
- 2) Do Libyan EFL teachers face any challenges in using technology? If so what are they?

Literature review

Technology plays a crucial role in providing a high-quality education as Ahmadi stated that “with technology being part of our everyday lives, it is time to rethink the idea of integrating technology into the curriculum and aim to embed technology into teaching to support the learning process.” (Ahmadi, 2018, p.119). Technology has always been an integral part of the teaching and learning environment. Raihan and Lock (2012) indicated that the educational environment that enhances technology is more effective than lecture-based class. It is considered as a part of teacher’s profession as it can be used to facilitate students’ learning (Ahmadi, 2018). Furthermore, it can provide learners with different resources (Bull and Ma, 2001). According to Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri (2017), technology can assist students to gain access to much information that their teachers may not have time to offer in class. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) and Zhao (2015) added that technology can provide students with many authentic materials in the target language. Arifah (2014) and Gençler (2015) indicated that computer-based activities can increase students’ motivation and enthusiasm.

Many studies have been conducted on the significance of integrating technology in English language teaching and learning. Parvin and Salam (2015) have identified two different views about the integration of technology into the class: 1) Cognitive approach which means students have exposure to language in a meaningful context and 2) social approach in which students have an opportunity for interaction and collaboration in real activities. Arifah, (2014) pointed out that the integration of technology within teaching can assist students to develop their thinking skills and to attract their attention. He has also emphasized the importance of using

multimedia in classrooms in terms of enhancing students' linguistic knowledge and offering various materials for analysis and interpretation of context and language. What is more, the use of technology such as internet and e-mail can urge learner-centered learning as Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri (2017) indicated that integrating technology in teaching can enhance student-centred class where students become responsible for their learning and work independently. In other words, teachers act as facilitators and monitors, and this has the potential to increase students' learning (Riasati, Allahyar, and Tan, 2012). Using technology can also change the attitudes of students and enhance self-confidence (Drayton, Falk, Stroud, Hobbs, and Hammerman, 2010). Moreover, the integration of technology into lessons can increase students' engagement and make learning interesting and interactive (Patel, 2013; Prayudi, Hakiki, Putra, Anzka, and Ihsan, 2021). Cooperation is an essential tool for learning, and, according to Harmer (2007), the use of technology can increase cooperative learning. This can be because students work together, share activities, and learn from each other through reading their peers' work (Keser, Huseyin, & Ozdamli, 2011). Bennett et al. (2000) make clear that the use of technology can improve teachers' teaching in order to meet their students' needs. The adoption of technology can assist teachers and students to create communities that are able to link them with others, and this can lead to expanding their opportunities for learning. The use of technology in the language class can increase the cooperation between students and their teacher and for Sabzian, Gilakjani, and Sodouri (2013), this has the potential to increase students' confidence as they have opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas. However, little studies has focused on the challenges that EFL teachers face in the implementation of technology within curriculum in teaching English. Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) stated that teachers in rural areas in Malaysia encounter challenges that relate to poor internet connectivity. Maniruzzaman and Rahman (2008) argued that lack of teachers' training and insufficient resources are the main obstacles that EFL teachers encounter in Bangladesh. Similarly, Jadal's study (2011) about the effectiveness of the audio-visual aids in teaching and learning of English at primary schools in India found that many English teachers are unable to use audio-visual materials because they are unaware of the different aids that are used in the classroom. Park

and Son (2009) pointed out that although EFL teachers in Korea have positive attitudes toward the use of audio-visual aids, they encounter constraints such as insufficient facilities and lack of time. A recent study by Ghwela (2023) about using technology in teaching English at Al-Asmarya University in Libya revealed that the main challenges that Libyan teachers encounter are lack of internet connection and lack of teachers who have sufficient knowledge with using technology. Although there is similarity between Ghwela's study and the current study in the context. They are different from each other in that Ghwela's study focused on teachers who teach undergraduate students, whereas this study investigates the perceptions of teachers who teach secondary school students. Furthermore, Ghwela used questionnaire and interview to collect data and the data analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The present study has used semi-structured interview and observation to generate data and the data were analyzed manually by using thematic analysis.

It can be said that the Libyan education system faces a number of challenges since 2011 conflict. Therefore, the integration of Information Technology (IT) and technological devices within curriculum is a challenge. The present study aims to find out the challenges that Libyan EFL teachers face in integrating technology within lessons.

Methodology

The qualitative approach was used to investigate Libyan EFL teachers' perspectives about the significance of integrating technology within the curriculum in teaching English. This study was case study because it focused on a group of Libyan teachers who were teaching English to secondary school students in Libya. The case study was selected because it has the potential to provide in-depth data to the topic and it allows the researcher to refer to the context (Yin, 2009). The participants in this study were 10 Libyan teachers of English in Zliten selected purposively 5 males and 5 females. They were chosen according to the following criteria: they were all Libyans, they were native speakers of Arabic, they were teaching English to secondary school students in public school, and they volunteered to participate in the study, but they were graduated in different years and they had different teaching experiences.

Semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows the researcher to follow up the interviewees' responses and to ask for clarification if necessary (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interview assisted the

researcher to explore the participants' perceptions towards using technology in EFL classrooms and to probe into the challenges. The interview was conducted in the teachers' room that was a quiet place to allow the participants to express their thoughts and ideas freely. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes.

The researcher also adopted a "complete observer" role in which the participants were observed in a number of sessions (Robson, 2011, p.318). The observation includes: the teachers' methods of teaching in terms of using technological devices and teaching aids in the activities that require technological devices. The researcher wanted to observe things as they occur without her intervention (Robson, 2011). Field notes were written and used as complement to the interview data (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007). The data were analyzed by using "thematic analysis" in which the data were coded into priori themes and emergent themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data were collected in Arabic, and, then, translated into English. Permission, anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality were taken into consideration (The bera, 2011).

Findings and Discussion

The significance of integrating technology

The findings of the study revealed that most of the Libyan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of technology in teaching English, they indicate the benefits of integrating technology within the curriculum. For instance, Maha stated that:

There are activities in the internet that can be accessed for free. They provide more opportunities for students to improve the four skills: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. In the era of the pandemic and when there is conflict, some students were able to take online quizzes. The scores of the tests were seen in a few minutes.

It is clear that Maha has awareness of the benefits of integrating technology in teaching. For Maha, technology is beneficial as it has assisted students to develop the four skills. She also highlighted the significance of the internet in terms of facilitating online- tests and correction.

Tamer added that technology helps students to practise and improve their listening, writing, and speaking in English and it can enhance situated learning:

Watching TV and DVDs has provided students with the opportunity to summarise what they have watched by writing. Students also discuss with each other the story of the film that they have watched.

Tamer's comment indicates that technology provides students with opportunities to listen, write, and speak in English. For him, technology also enhances learning as social participation as students discuss with each other and with their colleagues.

The results also showed that three teachers such as Sanad, Enas, and Seraj have used technology to improve students' vocabularies by using online English dictionaries to look for the meaning of new words, and this can contribute to increase students' vocabularies. For instance, Seraj reported that:

I ask my students to use online dictionaries to look for the meanings. This helps them to maximise their vocabularies as they are going to face new words and look for its meanings.

It is clear that perceptions of Maha, Tamer, Sama, Sanad, Enas, and Seraj are consistent with Ahmadi (2018) who indicated that technology can facilitate students' language learning.

The results of this study indicated that some teachers such as Fathi and Amna reported that technology have assisted them to encourage students to be independent learners and to share their thoughts and ideas in groups (i.e learning as social participaton). For example Fathi stated that:

There are some applications in the internet that encourage learners of English to study independently. These educational applications such as movies, quizzes, and conversations can be accessed by everyone, and this has the potential to encourage students to learn independently and to work collaboratively.

During the observation, the researcher observed students discussing their colleagues in a small groups. The movie that have been watched in a class has motivated them to speak in English and interact with their colleagues

and teacher, particularly when the teacher asked them what is the story of the film about?

It appears that the findings of the current study are in line with Sabzian, Gilakjani, and Sodouri (2017) who indicated that the implementation of technology in teaching has the potential to assist students to be independent learners. Moreover, it can enhance situated learning as students learn from each other and from their teacher as argued by Harmer (2007).

The challenges in technology integration

Insufficient time and the wide curriculum

The results showed that about half of the teachers reported that the time of the class period and the wide curriculum are the main challenges that lead to skipping some activities that rely on using technology. For example, Tareq stated that:

I can't incorporate technology, especially in listening activities as it needs time and the curriculum is too long. Thus, I have to skip them and focus only on the essential activities. When I use CD in listening activity, I find myself taking from other teachers' time. (Tareq interview)

The above comment indicates that limited time and the wide curriculum are the main challenges that lead to skipping some activities that rely on using technology. The interpretation is that in Libya English is taught for four classes per week and each period is only 45 minutes which is incompatible with the contents of the curriculum that should be covered. Therefore, Tareq covers the most important activities that may assist students to understand the subject and pass the exam. He also mentioned that when he uses technology within the curriculum, he borrows periods from other teachers as an indication of the insufficient time. Park and Son (2009) indicated that lack of time is one of the challenges that EFL teachers in Korea encounter; however, they did not elaborate further to add depth and detail. The current study indicates that insufficient time and the wide curriculum are one of the main obstacles that have adversely affected the use of technology in teaching.

Insufficient teaching aids

The data revealed that almost all teachers reported that there are no facilities in the classes except whiteboards and chairs. For example, Nabeel stated that;

The school does not offer the teaching aids. I want to use movie and listening activities, but I could not use them due to lack of the materials required for listening. Thus, I skip listening activities. There are white board and chairs only. I often use my mobile phone, but it is helpful to some extent, I need loudspeaker (silence).

(Nabeel interview)

Nabeel's comment indicates shortage of equipment such as language laboratories and other devices that are essential to teach effectively and efficiently. His perception reveals that he had a strong desire to integrate technology within the lesson, but limited facilities prevented him. It can said that since the conflict, the education system in Libya face many challenges, according to Rheme and Miliszewska (2012), the impact of the conflict on the education system includes dismantling of educational infrastructure and equipment. The findings of this study are in line with Maniruzzaman and Rahman (2008) who argued insufficient facilities is one of the main obstacles that EFL teachers in Bangladesh encounter at the tertiary level. However, the situation in Libya is different as Libya is an oil and rich country, and insufficient teaching aids can be due to the conflict and its effect on the education system.

Familiarity with traditional methods of teaching

The findings revealed that about five participants reported that their students are reluctant to participate in shared activities and to discuss with their colleagues and teachers, and this can be owing to unfamiliarity with independent learning and learning as social participation. Enas, for instance, stated that:

When I ask my students to work in groups to answer my questions about the conversation that they have already listened and seen on my mobile phone, they refuse to work together. They told me that they want me to talk all the time. Thus, I rarely integrate devices or technology within my teaching. (Enas interview)

The comment of Enas revealed that her students are familiar with teacher-centred approach rather than situated learning (i.e learning as social participation). This adversely affected her teaching method with regard to technology integration within the lesson delivery. Therefore, her usage of technological devices had become in limited occasions.

Low English competence

The data revealed that some teachers were dissatisfied with the level of their students, and this had a negative effect on their use of the technology. For instance, Sanad reported that:

The level of the students does not help me to integrate devices such as CDs or DVDs because students' levels are rather weak. If I speak English, they do not understand me, I have to translate each word. (Sanad interview)

The comment of Sanad showed students' weak English proficiency had a negative impact on his use of technology within the lesson. Thus, he considered The Grammar-Translation as the most appropriate method for the level of his students.

Shortage of trained teachers

The findings indicated that two teachers such as Amina and Fathi acknowledged that they are unable to integrate technological devices such as Projects and PowerPoint within the lesson because they are untrained to use such equipment and they do not take any training courses about presentation skills or how to prepare slides. Amina stated that:

I graduated fifteen years ago. My previous teachers did not use technological devices within the lesson; they only used marker and white board. There are listening activities that require the use of recording, but I skipped them. I am not good with technology. I have heard about presentation, but I have no idea about preparing slides and power point (silence). (Amina interview)

It is obvious Amina's previous educational experiences had affected her adversely. Her perception indicated that she was unfamiliar with technology integration within the lesson. Therefore, she skipped the activities that

depend on using technology. The findings of this study are consistent with the studies of Maniruzzaman and Rahman (2008) and Jadal (2011) who have found that lack of trained teachers is one of the challenges that EFL teachers face in Bangladesh and India respectively.

Conclusion

This study focuses on a group of Libyan EFL teachers who are teaching English to secondary school students in public school in Libya in terms of the effectiveness of integrating technology within the curriculum and the challenges. The results reveal that most of the participants have positive attitudes towards the integration of technology in teaching English. They have indicated that technology can contribute to develop students' four skills, namely: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, technology has the potential to improve students' pronunciation by listening to native speakers via DVDs and movie. In addition, technology can enhance independent learning and student-centred approach. The results also show that limited time and wide curriculum, insufficient teaching aids, familiarity with traditional methods of teaching, students' low level in English language, and untrained teachers are the main challenges that Libyan EFL teachers face in the use of technology within the curriculum. However, increasing the time period given to English classes or maximising the number of English classes per week, providing schools with technological devices, and offering training courses are the practical solutions.

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