FOSTERING EFL LEARNERS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH ICT: NEW TRENDS IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract
This article attempts to inquire about new trends in secondary schools in Benin in terms of competency-based approach implementation. The study has made it easy to examine and evaluate the results of the implementation of competency-based approach by Beninese EFL teachers and learners, for the success of the English language teaching and learning as far as using ICT is concerned.
Responses are obtained from a self-administered online survey, vis-à-vis interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations with state and private secondary EFL teachers as well. These responses have revealed that the adequate, appropriate, and effective use of ICT can really foster EFL teaching/ learning process in Benin. This process can be fostered due to the country's diversity of culture which will favour a diversity of knowledge, so as to trigger exchange of EFL teaching and learning in Beninese schools. It can be suggested that teachers should be trained for the adequate use of ICT either personally or by the government for the sake of EFL successful teaching.

Key words: competency-based approach; intermediary approach; effective use of ICT.

Résumé
Cet article renseigne sur les nouvelles tendances dans les cours secondaires du Bénin en ce qui concerne la mise en œuvre de l'approche par compétences. L'étude a alors facilité l'examen et l'évaluation des résultats issus de cette approche dont les enseignants et apprenants béninois sont témoin pour le bien et la réussite de l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais.
Des résultats sont obtenus par sondage en ligne, questionnaires, interviews et des visites de classes dans les cours secondaires publics et privés. Ceux-ci ont révélé que l'usage adéquat, approprié et effectif de la technologie peut favoriser réellement le processus d'enseignement/apprentissage de l'anglais, langue étrangère au Bénin. Ce processus peut être favorisé grâce à la diversité culturelle du Bénin qui impliquera la diversité de connaissances en vue de déclencher le partage des expériences d'enseignement et d'apprentissage dans les écoles béninoises. La suggestion à l'endroit de ces enseignants de la langue anglaise est qu'ils subissent une formation adéquate pour l'usage de la technologie de l'information et de la communication, soit personnellement ou par le gouvernement pour le bien de l'enseignement de cette langue.

Mots clés: approche par compétences, programme intermédiaire, usage effectif de la technologie.

Introduction

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays an important role in every field nowadays, and it is necessary to apply it to the teaching and learning of the English language in Benin. English language learners' experience with ICT can vary

greatly from one student to another. Some learners may have never used any technological materials due to their learning settings, or the poor living conditions of their parents or the whole country's underdevelopment. Other learners may be doing all of the troubleshooting. The current article provides EFL teachers with the opportunities for using ICT with their learners as well as advantages for using multimedia tools, and bilingual tips for managing media in secondary schools, at home, and everywhere.

EFL teaching and learning in Benin are not an easy task due to the bad living conditions of Beninese since it is difficult for many of them especially in rural areas to afford favourable materials related to ICT. In addition, the renewed outbreak of youth delinquency and criminality makes educators doubtful as far as the use of technological materials are concerned. The core of the problem is the cost of the adequate training related to ICT that the government could give to EFL teachers for the mastery of its effective use.

One of the reasons that have motivated us to undertake this study is the wrong ideas some Beninese people have about the use of technological materials such as computers and cell phones in schools. However, the use of ICT is very prominent for EFL teachers and learners for efficient teaching and learning in the secondary schools of the country nowadays. The main objective of the current study is to make EFL teachers and learners more aware of the importance of the appropriate use of ICT for EFL teaching and learning.

These two research questions formulated will help to delve into the topic:
- To what extent could the use of ICT foster English teaching and learning in Beninese secondary schools?
- How can this language be taught effectively through technology so as to make learners benefit from it and Beninese external and internal shareholders show their appreciation and support?

1. Literature Review

ICT stands for "Information and Communication Technologies." It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums. Melendez (2018), has defined ICT in the same way as an abbreviation for information and communication technologies. It's generally the combination of information technology, which focuses on computers and related devices, and digital telecommunications, including cell phones, the internet and other digital networks. He has said the term can be a bit amorphous, but it is fair to say types of ICT include cell phones, the internet and home and office networking devices. As far as the training required for its appropriate teaching is concerned, USAID (2018) adheres to

10 key principles when conceptualizing, designing and implementing ICT in education systems:

- ICT can be used to achieve education and development goals.
- ICT can be used to enhance student knowledge and skills
- ICT can be used to support data-driven decision making.
- All short- and longer-term costs should be included in budget planning.
- ICT alternatives should be explored to find appropriate solutions.
- Teacher development, training and ongoing support should be focused on.
- Involvement of many different stakeholders must be explored and coordinated.
- A supportive policy environment needs to be developed.
- Monitoring and evaluation into project planning must be integrated.
- "It takes capacity to build capacity"-System strengthening precedes system transformation. (Melendez, 2018)

All these principles will be very useful for Beninese educational system to trigger language skills for the success of the teaching and learning process.

Salehi&Salehi, (2012) have said participant students also agreed in the FGD that the class time is too short for teachers to integrate ICT as they spent half of the class time preparing for the power-point presentations and cannot give students the opportunity to use computers in ICT oriented classes. They have added this is similar to the findings of (Salehi&Salehi, 2012) where they have mentioned that one of the major barriers of integrating ICT is the lack of classroom time for students to use computers. It is, therefore, clear that the current class time is not sufficient for effective integration of ICT.

Furthermore, they have said this is similar to the findings of some researchers where they have found that although contemporary technological resources are key features in the propagation of ICT integration, the educational institutions often lack adequate equipment and access to electricity (Mndzebele, 2013) They have also said scarcity of equipment and limited access to internet are one of the roadblocks in integrating ICT in classroom (Salehi & Salehi, 2012) is, therefore, the lack of resources which prevented teachers to integrate ICT in the classrooms effectively. They have stated also that ICT training of teachers at university level would bear positive outcome on their teaching-learning practices. (Salehi&Salehi, 2012) voiced the same by asserting that teacher training institutions should provide appropriate and sufficient support to teachers.

Franklin (2005) has stated when he has indicated that using computers does not mean developing computer pedagogical content knowledge and skills. To our mind, computers cannot teach learners without being manipulated by human beings. Computers cannot switch themselves on without the guide of humans. The images

and events are recorded by human beings. This writer is right when he says that using computers does not mean developing computer pedagogical content knowledge and skills.

Luz Dary Arias Soto Zulma Rocío Buitrago Escobar and Clelia Pineda Báez, (2010-2011) have declared:

> Many countries, including Colombia, have worked hard on orienting their teachers in the enhancement of their practices by means of technology. However, there is still a lot to be done in this regard in Colombia, as teachers perceived that they did not receive methodological support in the use of ICT.

Training is necessary in everything; so Beninese educational authorities need orienting their teachers in the enhancement of their practices by means of ICT. Consequently, the use of ICT requires previous training to be able to handle those tools, as at the beginning not knowing the tools and their use is somewhat stressful. Beninese teachers lack technological training whereas this training is essential for teaching and learning process nowadays due to technology progress. External and internal actors of education still have a lot to do as far as ICT use is concerned because many secondary schools are still far from reaching such a goal.

It is said that the lack of support could be related to the fact that teachers are not provided with sufficient time to attend professional development courses, and that sometimes they confront working conditions that do not favour their professional development. This shares similarities with the analysis presented by Robertson (2003). This opinion is also verified in Benin since Beninese EFL teachers do not have time to attend ordinary training before thinking of ICT training. Their bad living conditions make them move from one school to another, just to spend hours with learners and get their pay, no matter their results.

Sometimes teachers not only have to keep up with instructional tasks or responsibilities, but they also have to comply with schedules to fulfil the requirements of their courses. In other words, they feel that they cannot integrate other resources to their courses because they might not be able to comply with the syllabus or the content of the school year. This might be a belief or a perception that might interfere with the inclusion of ICTs in the learning process, which parallels what Wolcott, has stated (2003 as cited by Adria & Rose, 2004). These authors are right in such a way that teachers' job is delicate and needs a lot of constraints at home, at school, and everywhere.

They need to keep up with instructional tasks or responsibilities and comply with the syllabi, which is very important for the process of teaching and learning. Besides, the instructional tasks should be clear so that learners could understand them and perform them accordingly. If they do not comply with the content of the school year, this teaching and learning cannot be relevant and no good results could be yielded. Most of the time, Beninese EFL teachers do not move from the study plan but they

centre on what textbooks propose. Some of them even follow the activities suggested to them in these textbooks step by step without making any supplementation.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this study takes into account the sampling, the instrumentation, the data collection and analysis. So, there is a questionnaire designed for twenty (20) randomly sampled EFL teachers. We have also interviewed a sample of thirty (30) learners of Beninese secondary schools, interviews addressed to EFL certified teachers, inspectors of Secondary schools, without forgetting class observations, phone calls, and the Internet use.

2.1. Research Instruments

2.1.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire administered to EFL teachers' has seven items. This questionnaire, through the first item has enabled us to know whether they can carry out the selection of learning areas with ICT. The second item asks whether they set any criteria for success of English teaching with computer. When learning areas are well-selected, these will be relevant for learners. Another item permits us to ask whether they can inform students of criteria ahead of the lesson with the use of computers. We have questioned them whether the demonstration of successful use of ICT is possible, and we want to know whether they could evaluate their student acquisition.

2.1.2. Interview Schedule

We have asked six questions to the thirty learners selected randomly for the issue:
- what ICT stands for
- importance of ICT for EFL learning
- possibility to learn with the use of ICT
- whether their teachers use ICT
- feeling about English learning through ICT
- the use of ICT in rural and urban areas

2.1.3. Class Observation

We have observed four (4) classes. During the class observations, we have reassured the whole class by telling them to feel free and that we should follow their lesson to see how they speak English. We have checked the teachers':
- use of ICT in EFL teaching
- way of using ICT to teach English
- use of ICT in rural areas
- use of ICT in urban areas

- way to foster EFL learners' learning with ICT

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Teachers' Responses

Table 1. Opinions about the use of ICT

Statements	Yes/%	No/%	Total/%
Good choice of learning settings	18/90%	02/10%	20/100%
Learners' success.	17/85%	03/15%	20/100%
Learners' good will	11/55%	9/45%	20/100%
Teachers' good practice	16/80%	04/20%	20/100%
Controlling student degree of language.	10/50%	10/50%	20/100%
Consolidation of students' learning	18/90%	02/10%	20/100%
Specifying the lesson end.	17/85%	03/15%	20/100%

Teachers have all recognised that they can evaluate students' acquisition with the effective use of ICT. They have also said that remedial opportunities for acquiring the knowledge/skills can be offered to learners and finally adequate closure can occur at the end of the lesson.

Table 2. Encouraging Students' English learning

Statements	Yes/%	No/%	Total/%
Raising learners' interests	20/100%	00/00%	20/100%
Learners' ability to learn	16/80%	04/20%	20/100%
Favourable changes	17/85%	03/15%	20/100%

2.2.2. Class Observation Data Analysis

From the six (4) classes observed, we have come up with the following.
- There is possibility for teachers to use ICT in EFL teaching. This use will be costly but teachers need to invest personally in their teaching process.
- Those who attempt to use ICT to teach English are mostly awkward in this use because they have no training about it.
- The use of ICT in rural areas is hardly existent due to the lack of adequate materials necessary for this teaching.
- Though the use of ICT in urban areas is possible, it is difficult for EFL teachers to carry it out in Beninese secondary schools.
- EFL learners' learning will be fostered with adequate and successful use of ICT.

Out of the six (6) teachers observed, four (4) in urban areas and two (2) in rural ones, two of them have used ICT in urban areas awkwardly.

2.2.3. Students' Responses

The total number of the students we have interviewed is forty (40). All of them have written what the acronym ICT stands for and its undeniable importance for EFL learning in Beninese context. They have all recognised their possibility to learn English with the use of ICT. Twelve students out of forty (30 percent) have confessed that their teachers use ICT somehow. Forty (40 / 100%) students have shown excellent feeling about English learning through ICT and said is necessary for them to learn English through it. They have said the use of ICT in urban areas will be in easier process than in rural ones.

3. Interpretations of Data

The results from the EFL teachers' questionnaire are revealing. As far as the good choice of learning settings is concerned, eighteen (18) teachers (90 %) have found it necessary to take into account the adequate choice of learning settings whereas only 02/10% of them have rejected it. Seventeen (17) students (85 %) said that there should be relevant learners' success in the use of ICT use and only 03/15% of them have denied the truth.11/55% of them said informing students of criteria ahead of the lesson is compulsory for EFL learning while 9/45% teachers have rejected. Sixteen teachers (80 percent) said they should show teachers' good practice for successful use of ICT in EFL classes but 04/20% said no. Half of them, 10/50% agreed on controlling student degree of language and half (10/50%) also disagreed. While 18/90% of these respondents said consolidation of students' learning is useful, only 02/10% have not rated this consolidation, and finally, 17/85% said specifying the lesson end at the end of the lesson is important. (Table1).

Through table2, Students' English learning is encouraged by raising learner interests according to the 20 respondents (100 percent) and sixteen teachers (80 percent) have justified learners' ability to learn when their English learning is through ICT. 17/85% teachers have said favourable changes could occur through ICT.

The current study also reveals the following:
- The results from the questionnaire: with the use of ICT, it will be possible for EFL teachers to easily choose relevant learning situations. They may even record appropriate events and class sequences related to learners' environment and needs.
- The effective use of ICT should favour learners' success and good will and they can learn English more easily. Whenever they have the good will to study, they will really get involved in the learning process.
- This use of ICT will show teachers' good practice since they could imitate excellent teachers and native speakers' teaching which they will restore in

front of their learners. To our mind, this good practice is very necessary for the teaching/learning process.

- Through the use of ICT, EFL teachers can control their students' degree of language that is to say how much they have mastered this language. We think that for such a control, teachers can record learners' former performances and replay so as to make learners better their language learning. This control can take place many times to enable learners to perform better and better.
- This permanent monitoring is worth helping EFL teachers to consolidate their students' learning process because they will get to know how they should reinforce the best students' performances by giving them more learning contents. While they are consolidating those bright learners, they should also provide less good students with appropriate activities to increase these learners' performances.
- It is very important for teachers to specify the end of their lesson and this is the proof that their classes are well-organised. All that has a beginning should have an end as well.
- An adequate use of ICT should raise their learners' interests in English learning because they will neither be bored nor tired of working.
- This use can raise learners' ability to learn and they will have favourable changes in their learning process provided that EFL teachers make good use of ICT accordingly.

Our inferences from students' interviews are as follows:

- It is necessary to make learners know ICT and its appropriate use for EFL learning. This importance will motivate them and they could take their learning process seriously.
- They have all recognised the possibility to learn English with the use of ICT in Beninese secondary schools. Consequently, EFL teachers have enormous responsibilities strengthen their teaching process by the effective use of ICT in their classes in order to make their teaching more interesting.
- It is necessary that EFL teachers use ICT in their classes due to the good and pleasant feelings learners can express about English learning through ICT.
- The use of ICT is compulsory in both rural and urban areas no matter the expenses it can create to EFL teachers and the government.
- From the class observations, we can notice that it is possible for teachers to use ICT in EFL teaching, and they should be taught the way of using ICT to teach English during regular training. In addition, ICT can be used in rural areas as well as in urban areas.
- EFL teachers should look permanently for the ways and means to foster EFL learners' learning with ICT efficiently.

When teachers select the learning area to be taught, it could be easy for them to deal with their teaching. Fortunately, they also select criteria for success and inform their learners of criteria ahead of the lesson; thus this freedom of selection is favourable for both teachers and learners for effective language teaching and learning. In addition, whenever teachers demonstrate to the students, successful use of the knowledge and skills through modelling, they should get involved. As several students are used to learning by imitating, they could observe teachers while demonstrating successful use of the knowledge and skills on computers, and even other students or native speakers.

Furthermore, if teachers succeed in evaluating their learners' acquisition, and provide them with remedial opportunities for acquiring the knowledge or skills, they should learn and acquire the English language successfully. Teachers may record their own demonstrations with their learners and play to the learners. This practice could encourage learners to perform well every time they are asked to work. Learners may also record their performance on their cell phones and frequently play at home and continue imitating appropriately.

- We can also safely say that the use of ICT will foster the English language teaching and learning in Beninese setting in several ways. Learners may carry their technological materials everywhere and as they are accustomed to cell phones, they could bring them everywhere. They could watch interesting recorded class activities at home and elsewhere, and practise them appropriately.

- We have discovered through our investigations that English can be taught effectively through the use of ICT. If this goal is really reached, then those Beninese secondary schools' headmasters, vice principals, and prefects who are accustomed to burning learners' cell phones they seize in classes, could change their mentality and get to know that cell phones are also teaching/learning materials.

4. Implications and Suggestions

It is important to mention that through the use of ICT, teachers increase their awareness of the complex processes students go through when developing their listening skills. It is obvious that learners develop their listening skills because they could listen to native speakers or other teachers and learners that they are not accustomed to. This is positive since they could grasp the gist of the messages even though they meet native speakers face to face and communicate with them successfully. All external and internal shareholders of education need to help learners afford technological materials and help them in the appropriate use. In this way, teachers, when they are oriented in terms of the adequate use of ICT, they

should be able to guide their learners accordingly. Thus, the latter could know how to use technological materials appropriately as well, instead of using it for needless things. EFL teachers should receive frequent and efficient methodological support in the use of ICT.

Conclusion

Teachers' own work with learning strategies should awaken their interest in guiding the students to use the strategies effectively. This experience could help EFL teachers to make learners interested in the English language teaching, learning, and acquisition. According to the data we have collected during my investigation, almost none of them have taken formal or informal courses in the use of ICT, and consequently, they do not use these technological resources in their pedagogical processes because of factors like educational policies and the accessibility and involvement in ICT professional development courses (Schibeci *et al*., 2008).

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Appendices: Research Instruments

Questionnaire to EFL Teachers

1- Can you carry out the selection of learning areas with ICT?
2- Do you set any criteria for success of English teaching with computer?
3- Can you inform students of criteria ahead of the lesson with the use of computers?
4- Is the demonstration of successful use of ICT possible?
5- Could you evaluate your student acquisition?

Interview Schedule for Learners

- What does ICT stand for?
- What is the importance of ICT for EFL learning?
- How can you learn with the use of ICT?
- Do your teachers use ICT?
- What is your feeling about English learning through ICT?
- What is the use of ICT in rural and urban areas?

Class Observation

- The way teachers use of ICT in EFL teaching
- The way of using ICT to teach English
- The use of ICT in rural areas
- The use of ICT in urban areas
- The way to foster EFL learners' learning with ICT