Technology as an Innovative Paradigm for Teaching Culture in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

The last decade witnessed an increasing use of educational technologies as an innovative paradigm to enhance the instructional process of culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. There has been a strong emphasis on the implementation of technology tools in EFL classrooms as they prove useful in enabling different modes of teaching, enhancing collaboration, fostering communication, creating motivational atmosphere, promoting discovery learning and developing learner-centered instruction. To this end, the purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of technology integration for teaching culture on the learning outcomes and the teaching practices in EFL classroom. It particularly aims to shed light on the major theoretical perspectives underpinning the incorporation of digital technology for teaching culture in EFL contexts.

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1. *Introduction*

Educational technologies; also called Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), have become an essential means of development for different fields worldwide. Given its critical importance, the educational field; in particular, emphasizes the implementation of technologies in the learning process both inside and outside of classroom settings. During the last decade, governments and higher education stakeholders have invested many funds for the incorporation of technologies in university settings for the enhancement of the teaching methods, learning process and students' competence (Lawrence, 2015). As a result, many universities regard the understanding and application of educational technologies as a key part of education along with reading and writing (Anderson, Van Weert, & Duchâteau, 2002).

Many researchers and educationists have recognized the importance of educational technologies in the education settings. Thomas Edison (1922) predicted that 'motion pictures would replace textbooks in classrooms', and B. F. Skinner (1960s) held the belief that 'new technology devices would vastly increase students' interests in learning'. Likewise, Sanchez,

Savage, &Tangney (2004) stated that the use of new technologies has changed the traditional view of learning, making it more based on 'doing'. They argued that educational technology has enhanced motivation, resource-based learning, classroom management, interaction, team work and the practice of learning tasks among students. According to Anderson et al., (2002), learning has become more student-centered due to the use of technologies. Hence, for developing the standards of education, universities were urged to train and equip teachers with the new technological materials (Bach, Haynes, & Smith, 2006).

The Algerian government has launched many policies for incorporating technology in universities in order to meet the international standards of education. The ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has given vital importance to train and equip all the faculties of universities with the essential technological tools. It has launched several projects such as the Project of the Ministry of Education to equip all schools with computers by 2005, the Distance Education Project, the Virtual University Project, etc. and has granted various scholarships for researchers and teachers to visit abroad universities for the sake of enhancing the educational

standards (Hamdy, 2007). Recently, most of the Algerian universities are equipped with computers and internet so that they could be used by teachers for achieving the national educational objectives. This motivated the researcher to investigate about the impact that such technologies have on the teaching of EFL culture and students' learning outcomes.

As a matter of fact, there have been numerous studies conducted about the use of educational technologies in higher education, most of these studies focused on the factors that influenced the implementation of technologies in classroom settings, but very few of them investigated the effects of such technologies on the learning and teaching process of EFL culture. Hence, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the actual efficiency of educational technologies in enhancing the instruction of EFL culture.

2. *Defining Digital Technology and Culture*

2.1 Digital Technology

Many scholars, policy makers and educationalists use different terms for talking about digital technology. In the educational context, different terms are used such as *Educational Technologies, Online Teaching and Learning Technologies, Learning and E-Learning Technologies and Digital Learning*

Objects (Smith, 2004). In the context of society and communication, some terms are used as *Electronic Information and Communication Technologies, IT Networks and Communication Protocols, Information Agent and Communication Technology* (Van der Merwe, & Pool, 2002). However, when it comes to definitions there seem to be a general consensus that it is a set of technological tools that encompasses computers, software, email, audio conferencing, teleconferencing, internet, television lessons, radio broadcasts, interactive video, audiocassettes and CD ROMs, etc. that can be utilized for different objectives in education (Van der Merwe, & Pool, 2002).

2.2 Culture

Culture comprises the concepts, practices, abilities, traditions, customs, lifestyle and tools that characterise distinct groups of individuals within a particular community (Brown, 2000).

Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003) describe culture as:

> *a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artefacts they*

produce and the institutions they create. (p. 45)

Culture is an essential component of the increasingly globalised society, where people of various countries, origins, and ethnicities interact through the use of shared languages. This reality has necessitated academics to reevaluate the standards of mastery in a foreign language. For academics and scholars, it is now mandatory for students to acquire knowledge of the target culture.

Rivers (1981) delineated seven aims for learning about cultures. This involves helping students comprehend the human behaviour, the impact of societal variables on interaction, the standard practices of the target culture in various situations, the cultural significance of prevalent terminology, the critical viewpoints on the target culture, developing and maintaining essential skills for organising and analysing materials pertinent to the target culture, and fostering intellectual curiosity and empathy towards its members.

By learning other cultures, foreign language students can improve their intercultural communicative competence. This competency enables them to comprehend and establish connections with individuals from diverse contexts, recognising them for their distinctive personalities and unique identities (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). This competency underscores the students' capacity to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries, acquire knowleage on personal actions and thoughts from external viewpoints, and assess and modify one's own behaviour, belief, and mindest.

3. *Theoretical Perspectives on Educational Technologies*

3.1 Behaviorist Theory

Regarding the use of technologies in higher education instruction, there are some main theories that have been linked to the implementation of educational technologies in EFL classrooms such as Behaviorist theory, Cognitive theory and Constructivist theory. The Behaviorist theory that has been innovated by Ivan Pavlov (1949-1936) and developed by Frederic Skinner (1904-1990), views that learning is much influenced by external stimulations, rewards and punishments. Academic scholars and educationalists assert that the behaviorists' principles of learning can be applied through the usage of computers and technologies in classrooms.

3.2 Cognitive Theory

The Cognitive theory, which is represented by Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915-) and David P. Ausubel (1918-2008), asserts that the nature of learning is highly related to the mental processes of individuals. Cognitivists think that individuals are born with different mental capacities for receiving, analyzing and using information. They assume that such cognitive capacities as critical thinking, problem solving and information analyzing would be developed under computer-assisted instruction.

3.3 Constructivist Theory

The Constructivism theory developed by Jean Piaget states that children who experience activities are more likely to "inter-coordinate" or connect their experiences in their daily lives, and this would support the development of their learning. Piaget embraces the concept that learning can be enhanced by active participation rather than passive participation (Piaget, 1955). The core of learning for constructivists is social experiences, initiatives and discovery learning. John Dewey (1859-1952), one of the most known psychologists, argued that practicing is the essence of learning, which without it, learners might be lost. He emphasized that learners construct their learning through practice, and that educational programmes should respect these psychological needs of learners. The

modern view of constructivism sees that the use of technology supports inter-coordinated learning. Advocates of this view claim that technology enables learners to experience and be engaged into different scenarios within various subject areas (Ford, & Lott, 2009). They believe that technology provides many opportunities for learners that would not be available somewhere else; it can enhance the cultural competence of learners by enabling them to experience and actively participate in different educational opportunities such as hands-on activities and authentic scenarios (Ebert, 2012). The influence of Constructivist theory on the use of educational technologies in EFL culture instruction could be seen through the creation of educational games, the utilization of multimedia and online communications for promoting students' cultural knowledge.

3.4 Multiple Intelligences Theory

The theory of Multiple Intelligences, put forth by Howard Gardner (1943), emphasizes that each individual possesses a unique intelligence, and that the learning instruction could be effective if the curriculum contents, teaching methods and educational environment fit the learners' intelligence. This theory has encouraged the use of educational technology to improve the instruction of

EFL culture and optimize the individualized intelligence. According to the Multiple Intelligences theory, there are nine types of human intelligence which should be taken into consideration for the design of instruction, these are:

1) linguistic intelligence

2) logic-mathematical intelligence

3) spatial intelligence

4) bodily-kinesthetic intelligence

5) musical intelligence

6) interpersonal intelligence

7) intrapersonal intelligence

8) naturalistic intelligence

9) existentialist intelligence.

3.5 Instrumentalist vs. Determinist Perspectives

According to a number of educationists and researchers, new technologies foster the teaching and learning process of EFL culture and enhance the quality of education. Different perspectives value the role of technology in the higher education section; however, the way they perceive its role is different. There are some theorists who believe that technology is only a tool or instrument that can be used by individuals to reach their objectives, this theoretical

perspective is called "instrumentalist". Adopters of this view argue that technology is merely an instrument for usage by teachers in their EFL instruction and it does not have many implications since what is important is the way it is used (Blake, 2013). On their account of technology, they argue that the way technology is used and designed influences its effects. Sometimes the design and implementation of technology could result in external effects that were not intended.

On the other hand, there is another theoretical perspective called "determinist" which sees technology as a determinant of success and process in higher education. Theorists who hold this belief claim that technology has a great influence on the instruction of EFL culture as it enables autonomous and independent learning, fosters motivation, enhances communication and supports distance learning instruction. Constructivist theorists also believe in this perspective as they regard technology as an influencing factor for change (Blake, 2013).

Blake (2013) suggests that the use of technology should be accompanied with more social involvement and openness in order to minimize the negative effects that technologies might have on the education sector. He notes that obstacles facing the effective utilization of technologies

should be addressed for maximizing the advantages of educational technology. Taking this framework in consideration, the following section examines the role of educational technologies in higher education instruction.

4. Benefits of Technology Integration in the Instruction of EFL Culture

4.1 Effects of Technology on the Learning and Teaching Process of EFL Culture

Different scholars and researchers such as Cradler and Bridgforth (1996), Norman (1999), Gulley (2003), Thorne and Payne (2005) and others assert that technology enhances the teaching and learning processes. They view that educational technologies have numerous advantages on the way humans learn and teach such as: enabling independent and efficient learning, fostering interaction, saving time, providing resources and research tools, improving motivation and interest, increasing opportunities for situated practice, improving language skills and facilitating teaching through the use of some tools as PowerPoint and projectors.

The integration of educational technologies can help enhance the quality of education in different subject areas. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

The rapid breakthroughs in new information and communication technologies will further change the way knowledge is developed, acquired and delivered. It is also important to note that the new technologies offer opportunities to innovate on course content and teaching methods and to widen access to higher learning. (Queiroz & Figueiredo, 2016)

Educational technologies make the learning of EFL culture faster, more efficient and flexible so that learners can learn at any time and from anywhere. This would help develop their lifelong learning and enhance their autonomous education. In addition, these technologies make it easier for EFL learners with special needs to access knowledge despite geographical and temporal barriers.

Another contribution of educational technologies is that they offer EFL students an easy access to learning resources such as books, research papers, articles, documents, videos, online communities, etc. This would in turn maximize the opportunities of their learning and support just-in time learning. With the easy access of knowledge, availability of resources and provision of opportunities and practices for learning shared through technological equipment,

students' cultural competence can be fostered (Young, 2002; Cholin, 2005).

McGorry (2002) asserts that the utilization of technology would solve problems related to the poor quality of education in any place, arguing that it can be used to address issues such as costs, lack of teachers, large classes, time and geographical barriers. Likewise, Lim and Chai (2004) believe that technology can solve different problems facing the teaching and learning process such as that of time and space. It removes spatial barriers as learners can access knowledge easily from any place, and it promotes speedy and just-in time learning.

According to Yuen, Law, & Wong (2003), technology usage improves relevant skills in disadvantaged areas. It enhances EFL learning by doing, real time interactions, independent learning, directed instruction, critical thinking, problem solving and information analyzing, as well as the opportunity to gain abundant information through various tools and from different perspectives. Therefore, the authentic learning context would be fostered.

A large number of researchers such as Susman (1998), Alexander (1999), Jonassen (1999) and others think that technology facilitates students' active learning, collaborative learning and higher cognitive thinking in higher

education, believing that it functions as a means for adapting the curriculum contents and activities to fit the learners' individual needs and capacities. Thus, it has a critical role in enhancing EFL learners' cultural and cognitive development. Moreover, educational technology increases opportunities for constructivist learning as it enables discovery learning, student-centered instruction, experiential learning, resource-based knowledge, situated practice and authentic environment of learning in EFL context (Berge, 1998).

Another advantage of educational technologies as seen by Long (2001) and Loveless (2003) is that they make the EFL teaching instruction more enjoyable, attractive and interesting. The use of multimedia and internet makes the lectures interesting, and that would in turn helps EFL learners understand them better and retain them for a long time span. Unlike traditional teaching method which is based on text and print-based materials, educational technology approaches teaching from multiple ways and methods. It allows for the transition of cultural knowledge in different interesting pathways, assisting EFL learners to actively discover, experience and explore in classrooms rather than passively sit, listen and remember. Furthermore, it engages students into real interactions and authentic practices. Thus, educational

technology fosters student-centered and diagnostic learning in classroom settings.

4.2 Factors for the Successful Integration of Technologies in Classrooms

Despite the vital role that digital technology plays in the educational process, recent studies show that teachers do not efficiently use it to enhance the quality of their instruction (Zhao & Cziko, 2001). Notwithstanding its benefits, the incorporation of technology in EFL cultural instruction presents certain obstacles. Levy (2009) identifies the digital gap as a critical issue that restricts access to technical resources in certain locations, especially in countries with poor infrastructure. This inequality to technology access can lead to differences in the cultural educational experiences of EFL students from varying socioeconomic classes. Furthermore, significant investments in equipment and teacher educational programmes are necessary for the incorporation of technology into EFL instruction, which may be absent in some EFL contexts (Blake, 2013).

A further difficulty is the possibility of students' superficial involvement with the cultural material. Although technology provides numerous cultural resources, EFL students may risk concentrating on the superficial elements of culture, such as stereotypes or popular trends, instead of acquiring a profound comprehension of basic cultural principles and social conventions (Risager, 2007). This underscores the requirement for students' systematic investigation and critical evaluation to the cultural content in order prevent them from forming simplistic perceptions of the target culture.

According to Zhao and Cziko (2001), the effective utilization of technologies in the higher education sector requires three conditions. First, teachers should have positive attitudes towards the implementation of technology in classrooms; they should believe that its usage is effective and not disruptive. Second, teachers ought to participate in training courses designed for improving the use of technological tools; they should be as well involved in useful team projects and instructional partnerships for the change and innovation of education. Finally, teachers should be confident that they can use educational technologies effectively and make a change in their instruction.

Many studies such as that of the Second Information Technology in Educational Study (SITES) (Voogt, et al., 2013) have explored the ways in which educational technologies can be applied effectively

for the optimal usage of it. This study has described how new technologies have been successfully implemented in many countries. Although it has not focused on the effects of technology on education, the study has approached the subject matter form another angle by investigating how institutional administrations, faculties and pedagogic staff can make a good use of computers, devices, and digital platforms for educational objectives. Additionally, various research studies as those conducted by Solar, Sabattin, and Parada (2013) and Gallego, Gutierrez, and Lee (2015) have argued that, for the enhancing of the quality of education in all levels, an effective utilization of educational technology should be adopted.

Furthermore, other studies have called for an effective incorporation of educational technology in university classrooms for the advantages that it might have on learners' performance. For example, Ellis and Loveless (2013) assert that the benefits of information technologies on higher education cannot be ignored, and that the higher education sector cannot be isolated from the current technological innovations that would positively enhance the quality of EFL education.

Similarly, Chan, Bernal, and Camacho (2013) stated that digital technology has a critical role in developing university

education and meeting the dynamic needs of learners. Sari and Mahmutoglu (2013) also believed that the higher education sector needs to renew its teaching methodology and approaches, it should adopt a learner–centered teaching approach and enhance more active learning, and this according to the authors, cannot be easily achieved without the utilization of new technologies. In the same way, Iniesta-Bonillo, Sánchez-Fernández and Schlesinger (2013) think that the use of educational technology has a significant contribution on the improvement of EFL classrooms as it provides a paradigm shift to the learning and teaching process, making it more active, autonomous, dependent and efficient. As a consequence, there has been an increasing adoption of digital technologies in the educational policies of numerous governments worldwide, according to a report made by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (Castillo-Merino & Serradell-López, 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

New technologies have remarkably affected all the life sectors of human beings. Each time a set of new technological equipment emerge, a process of change will result after their usage. Higher education sector, like other life sectors, has been greatly influenced by the development of new technologies

and has always looked for establishing necessary policies for implementing them.

The aim of this paper was to shed light on the main theoretical perspectives regarding the impact of educational technology on the teaching and learning process of EFL culture. Synthesizing the different relevant theoretical views, it can be concluded that digital technology has influenced the instruction of EFL culture in various ways, and this effect will significantly increase in the future as it is anticipated that technology will be a critical agent for the change and innovation of education in the next few years. Therefore, the continuous development and usage of new technologies for teaching culture in EFL classrooms will have a vital effect on the quality of the teaching and learning processes. Nevertheless, a paradigm shift concerning the efficient incorporation of technology should be adopted for ensuring a successful instruction.

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