

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: MOHAMMED I UNIVERSITY AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The integration of digital technologies in the educational arena has become one of the most debatable issues among institutions and universities recently. They, indeed, have been perceived as complementary resources that respond to teachers' questions and meet students' individual needs. Therefore, teachers are constantly invited to integrate these technologies in their teaching practices to cope with the 21st century problems and boost students' learning outcomes.

This case study investigates the use of open educational resources (OERs) by English Language teachers and their attitudes towards the implementation of technology in their classrooms. It reports the results of an inquiry carried out at two broadly different contexts. The American Language Center, which is a private English language center and the English department of the faculty of letters and Humanities, Oujda, which a public university.

Keywords: Technology, OERs, Educational Technologies, English, Teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The arena of language teaching and learning has changed over time. Indeed, today's world is characterized essentially by the wireless Internet and open-free sources of information. Gone are the days when research and studies used to be done in libraries using books and manuals. The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), digital library, online journal articles, and variety of educational resources are pervasive. Students and teachers have instant access to millions of educational resources including books, essays and lectures on every subject. Thus, the advancement of information communication technologies (ICT) has shaped the way we perceive knowledge building and presented new circumstances for more effective and efficient implementation of teaching and learning programs.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

The article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared that every person on earth has the right to education, and that "technical and professional education shall be made generally available" (United Nations, 1948). Therefore, open educational resources have finally made it possible to respond to this statement and achieve this universal right to education. OpenCourseWares are among the famous open online collections of educational materials that are used in courses at universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Open University, Johns Hopkins, Kyoto University, Notre dame, and Korea University (Caswell, Henson, Jenson, and Wiley, 2008). They added that currently over

2,500 open access courses are freely available from over 200 universities worldwide and that additional higher education institutions are launching OpenCourseWare-style projects regularly (p. 2). While the purpose of Educational Resources (OER) movement is to create and share educational content and materials that are empowered by technology on a global scale.

2.1.1 Definition

According to UNESCO (2012), Open Educational Resources can be defined as any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt, and re-share them. OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation.

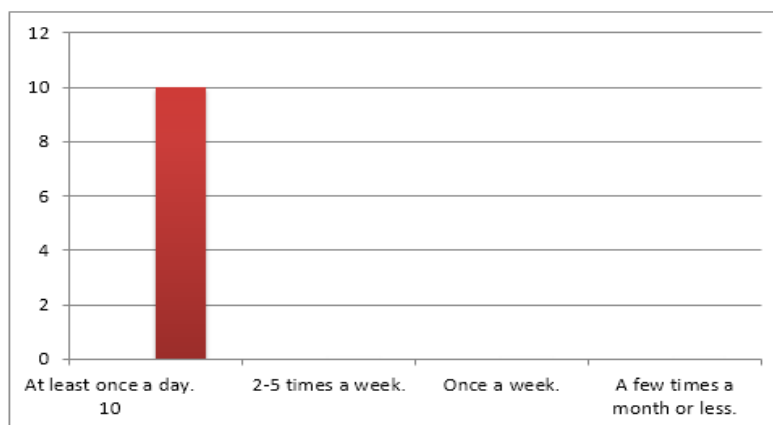
OERs are also defined as teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others.

The Open Education program at Creative Commons works to maximize these barriers, supporting the CC mission through education, advocacy and outreach on using the right licenses and open policies to maximize the benefits of open educational resources (OER) and the return on investment in publicly funded education resources.

2.1.2 The methodology

The process of data collection was done through two varied stages. At first, questionnaires were delivered to English language teachers who teach in two contexts, the American Language Center which is a private language center and the English department within Mohammed I University, which a public higher educational institution. Indeed, plethoras of questionnaires were distributed but due to time constraints and other considerations, only ten teachers have filled in the questionnaires. In the second stage of investigation, interviews were conducted over the same teachers. This was done in an intention to inquire upon the experiences teachers have had while working in two broadly different settings and to examine the differences and similarities in terms of usefulness, effectiveness and limitations of technology implementation and the use of OERs in private as well as public sector.

2.1.3 Findings of Questionnaires and Interviews



The result of questionnaires depicts the relationship teachers have with technology in general. Simple questions were used as how often do they go online, how often do they check their emails, and what kind of technology do they have access to on a daily basis.

Fig. 1. How often do teachers go online

It can be inferred from the graph that all teachers who participated in the survey go online at least once a day. Indeed, teachers have become used to technology and mobile use on a regular basis, and have made of it an inevitable part of their lives.

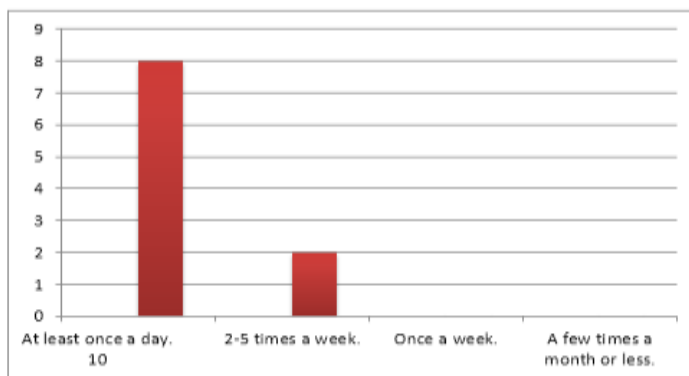


Fig. 2. How often teachers check their emails

In addition, this second figure outlines the fact that most teachers check their emails at least once a day. This shows once again that teachers have learned the basic skills of technology manipulation. Only two teachers have answered that they check their emails from 2 to 5 times a week.

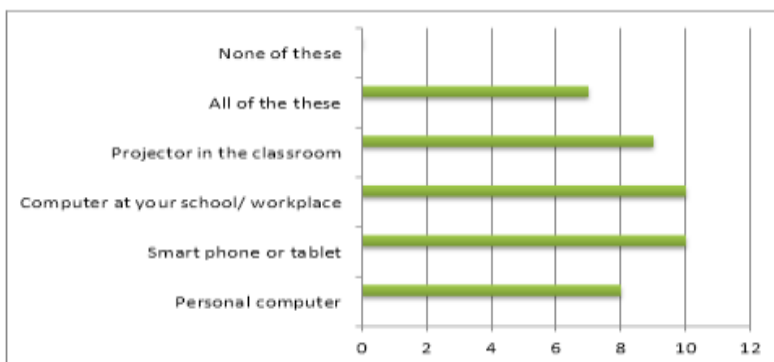
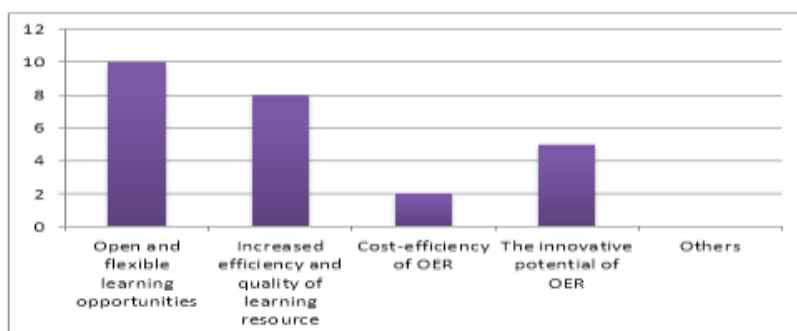


Fig. 3. Technological devices teachers have access to.

From the figure, it can be easily understood that most teachers have at least a personal computer, a smartphone, a tablet and computer at their workplace. Thus, technological devices have become an integral part of their lives.



As previously mentioned, the targeted teachers work at both the ALC and Mohammed I University. Regarding their attitudes towards the implementation of technology in their classrooms in general. Most of the answers were positive. However, the advantages stated by these teachers vary from one teacher to another. Some of the agreed upon merits stated are including but not limited to:

Fig. 4. Merits of Online Resources according to questioned teachers

In the second stage of this study, interviews were conducted over the same teachers. As matter of fact, when these teachers were asked about OERs, we got facial expressions implying that these teachers have never heard of it before. At first, we thought it is only the acronym that is probably not familiar to them. Nevertheless, the truth is that these teachers have indeed never heard nor used the term previously. This

has driven us to ask questions differently and to shift them towards their own methods of getting online resources and educational materials.

The answers to the questions were all similar in that the interviewed teachers tend to use websites such as “busy-teachers” and “teach-this” to find materials that suit classroom activities and complement the target language being covered. The graph below shows the websites and software that are used by these teachers to complement their classroom activities.

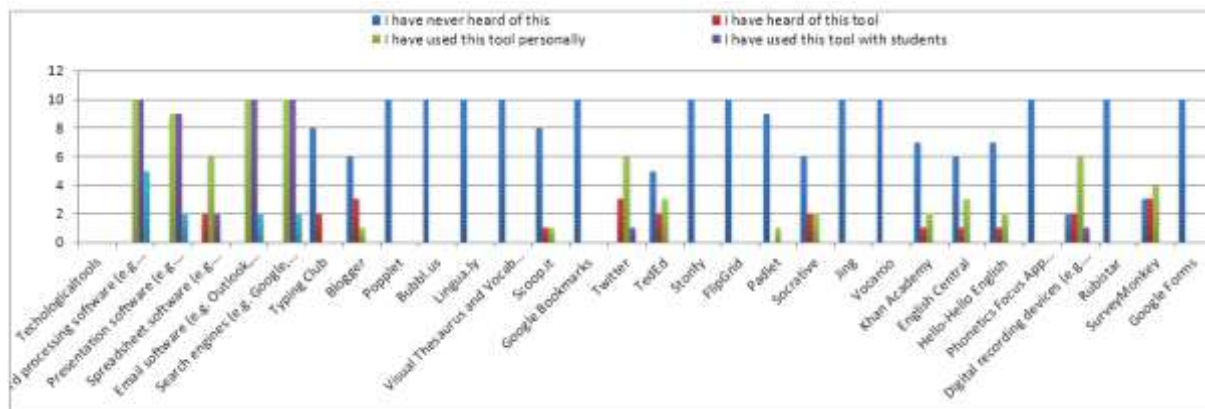


Fig. 5. Websites and Software used by interviewed teachers

As far as research techniques are concerned, teachers asserted that the choice of websites depends largely on what they want to achieve with it. That is to say the purpose of the lesson. They claimed that authentic websites are chosen to fit learners’ interests which is a key factor to keep their motivation higher. Furthermore, easy structure is another criterion upon which they build their website choices for, according to them, they allow more of approachable and understandable materials for both learners and teachers.

In terms of the creative side of the teacher, the question that was asked was as to whether or not these teachers when selecting educational materials and contents, they add their creative touch on it. Here, the answers varied a bit from one teacher to another. Three of the interviewed teachers insisted that adding something creative is necessary especially when adapting the resources to the level of students as well as to the objectives of the lesson.

The most important part of this study is the similarities and differences teachers find when they teach at two discrepant contexts. The interviewed teachers reported that there is a wide discrepancy between the two settings. They reiterated that at the university, they most of the times find themselves teaching more than 100 students in the same classroom. This undoubtedly causes the interaction to diminish and pushes the teacher to lecture. Therefore, the Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is potentially much higher than Student Talking Time (STT). This creates an atmosphere of teacher-centeredness where passivity thrives. Students become nothing more than passive consumer of the knowledge presented by the teacher.

Another problem that they face is the three hours problem. Teachers reported that teaching only three hours per week is not enough for them to cover the curriculum they are supposed to teach. Thus, they do not waste their time searching for extra materials and resources using internet or more precisely OERS. They indeed tend to rush as much as they can to finish the program. Consequently, students cannot get enough opportunities to speak, interact and discuss with their classmates, and most importantly to experiment with the target language. Teachers reported that responsive speaking is the only technique they use. This is one of the common fronted version of speaking at the university.

At the American language Center (ALC), however, these same teachers use variety of technological tools to get extra materials and resources. They provide students with ample of speaking opportunities either in pair or group work. This invites students to participate fully in classroom activities and get involved fully in the learning process. This also helps in making their learning experiences more interesting, engaging, and productive. Interestingly enough, it paves the way for them to experiment with the target language and prepares them for 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on questionnaires and interviews, it seems that teachers fall into three different categories because the context in which they are working vary widely and the access they have to internet varies. This has

created what is referred to as digital divide that potentially and tremendously affects what teachers can do in their classrooms. The categories have been described by Dudeney & Hockly (2015); the Technophobe; Digital-immigrants and Techno-geeks.

The technophobe refers to the fact that some teachers who might be wary of new technologies especially with the rapid advancement of ICT, as a result of lack of confidence, facilities and most importantly training. Some of the teachers argued that they are comfortable with the way they teach and that they do not need to integrate technology in their teaching practices.

The second category is that of digital immigrants, which refer to teachers who have come late to the world of technology. Moreover, their use of technology is often limited to email checking, word processing and google search engines.

The third and last categories refers to teachers who have started implementing technology in their classrooms and are enthusiastic and overzealous to embrace technology more, learn more about it and do some training in order to make the most out of their teaching experience.

In fact, the problem that arises within here is that we have teachers who are either technophobes or digital immigrants. While students are digital natives! This latter is a term coined to refer to someone who has grown up using technology and hence feels comfortable and confident using it (Dudeney & Hockly, 2015). When a gap as such arises, most teachers feel a bit frustrated and shut their doors to technology in order not to show their weakness. However, having digital natives in a classroom should be hailed as an added value for teachers can rely on them to provide their support when they face technical problems. This is because students, who are digital natives, are technologically more knowledgeable. Thus, their presence should not be considered as a handicap but it is the other way around because when precisely their teachers ask students for help, they feel delighted and happy and this is a priceless opportunity to boost their self-confidence and demonstrate their skillset.

4. CONCLUSION

Concisely, it can be deduced that teachers over which the study was conducted, do not have great interests in learning about technology. Their frequent use of technological devices is restrained to basic things such as email checking, google searching, word processing, and PowerPoint presentations. As far as OERs are concerned, they are something they have never heard of before. Therefore, an urgent call to run workshops, seminars and conferences in order to sensitize teachers and motivate them to learn about technology is compulsory. For teachers can reap the benefits of technological tools and make the most out of their teaching experiences.

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