



SOPHOMORE EFL STUDENTS' CHALLENGES TOWARDS ICT INTEGRATION IN ENGLISH ORAL PERFORMANCES

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Abstract

Speaking is an important skill for English language learners to master. In this context, ICT could play a crucial role in improving students' speaking abilities if used correctly and should be integrated into teaching oral expression since it brings the actual world into the classroom. Hence, the usage of technology significantly impacts on EFL students' capacity to communicate both within and outside the classroom. Improving the speaking skill has always been challenging for students; thus, the current study focuses on the challenges and impediments second year students at University of Bordj Bou Arreridj faced in delivering their oral performances. Seeking to achieve the aim of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 13 students in the English department. The results revealed four main challenges: technical problems,

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lack of experience in using ICTs, interaction problems between students and instructors, and lack of teachers' training.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), speaking, challenges, and EFL students.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has extended throughout the world, it is now used in practically every aspect of life. Educators frequently employ ICT resources, such as computer, telephone (telecommunication products), walkie-talkies, digital cameras, and audio-recording software to enhance the teaching/learning process. Tremendous demand for the integration and adoption of ICT into the teaching and learning environment offers teachers and students more opportunities to work efficiently in this digital age (Benraghda, 2024; Lawrence & Tar, 2018). The term Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is regarded as the technologies that enable telecommunications-based access to information. It is comparable to information technology (IT), but it is mostly concerned with communication technologies (Ratheeswari, 2018). ICT is simply a set of materials and tools, which are used to communicate, store, and manage information. The latter is considered an important element in the learning process, as it provides learners with opportunities to learn the language and improves their communicative competence.

In the early 2020s, the world witnessed an outbreak of the deadly coronavirus epidemic, also known as COVID-19. Although many endeavors have been made by governments to find a permanent cure, but no effective cure has been achieved yet. The spread of this virus led to unexpected negative consequences (Guemide & Maouche, 2020) as it has impacted the educational systems worldwide (Osman & Keevy, 2021), consequently, universities and schools have been locked down in order to curb the virus's spread. As a result, governments and policymakers have shifted the teaching and learning process towards online learning. Like many other countries, which were infected by this virus, Algeria was one of them. The Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has ordered universities to transmit to online teaching and learning mode by establishing E-learning platforms to curb the spread of the virus.

Therefore, teachers and learners have been obliged to cope with this new method.

The primary focus of this research is to investigate university undergraduates' attitudes and the impediments being faced in the academic context, as this aspect seems crucial in the usage and adoption of ICTs. In psychology, the term attitude refers to the emotions and behaviors of a specific person towards an object, or event. Attitudes have a great impact on behavior; they are often the result of upbringing or experience (Rastogi & Malhotra, 2013). As for challenges, they are difficulties that require efforts and determinations to be faced or to be achieved. For English language learners, speaking is a vital skill to develop. In this context, if utilized effectively, ICT can help students improve their speaking capacities, and it should be included into oral expression instruction since it brings the real world into the classroom. As a result, the ability of EFL students to communicate both within and outside the classroom is significantly impacted by their use of technology (Heeks, 2010). Furthermore, the process of developing and transmitting meaning via the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of situations is known as oral performance. It is a necessary skill for effective communication in any language, especially when speakers are not conversing in their native tongue. Language learners usually feel that knowing a language leads to the ability to speak that language; nevertheless, this component of language is also an essential part of the learning process. It is important for children to realize that when they learn to speak, they may use that ability to learn (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

Literature Review

Technology has become indispensable in our daily lives, particularly in education. It is becoming more common in the educational community. Teachers may be integrating technology to share their lectures, present more information, and improve students' learning by incorporating it into their lessons. Technology, according to Madhavaiah et. al. (2013), is a powerful tool with enormous potential for paving high-speed highways from outdated educational systems to systems capable of providing learning opportunities for all, better serving the needs of 21st-century work, communications, learning, and life. As the prevalence of English grows on

a daily and a global scale, English teachers see the need for change in their language teaching approaches.

Challenges of ICT Integration

A number of research papers have tried to investigate the obstacles and barriers that students face when using ICT, such as the study that was carried out on Jadara University students in Jordan about using E-learning programs during school holidays. The findings pinpointed that the students lack of effective training, lack accessibility, and poor teaching methods of the trainers (Rabbah, 2020). Limited or lack of ICT skills and resources make online learning non-inclusive (Bazimaziki, 2020). According to Ta'amneh's (2021) study, students' challenges towards virtual classes was examined, his research results showed that students' difficulties revolved around pedagogical, technical, and personnel obstacles during the attendance of virtual classes. Furthermore, an interview with students at SMAN 6 Kata Bengkulu, examined the problems in learning English using Google Classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that the drawbacks of using this application were in opening and uploading files or videos. Students struggled with online learning and preferred face-to-face classes. In their opinion, the disadvantages of online programs outweigh the advantages (Diana, Yunita, & Harahap, 2021). The main challenges of online learning are poor internet access, low engagement, low motivation, low participation, and low understanding (Zboun & Farrah, 2021). Online learning cannot achieve the desired results in underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan, where a large majority of students do not have access to the Internet due to technical and financial problems. The lack of face-to-face interaction with the teacher, response time, and lack of traditional classroom socialization were some other issues highlighted by college students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Farrah, and Al-Bakry (2020) discovered that online learning is ineffective in developing countries where the majority of people do not have access to the internet due to technical and economic barriers.

Moving to the Algerian online learning status, Ghounane (2021) in his research on using Facebook as a learning platform in Algeria, during the COVID-19 pandemic claimed that Facebook was considered as the second leading E-learning tool after Moodle platform. Guerza (2015) investigated how ICT use enhances learners' autonomy, the study result displayed that

ICT tools not only help learners express themselves in the target language, but also helped them expose their personal identities. In addition, EFL students at Oran University have overall positive perspectives on using Zoom sessions (Benmansour, 2021). According to a study performed at Saida University, neither teachers nor students were well prepared for an online learning experience. There are more drawbacks than benefits. According to the study findings, E-learning has become a difficult process due to a lack of technical skills, a lack of experience on the part of the teachers, and the students; social position. The study also discovered that Master's students have unfavorable attitudes toward E-learning and would choose face-to-face interaction in the classroom and handouts over virtual learning (Benadla & Hadji, 2021). Students are opposed to the use of technology; traditional methods like handouts are their favorites (Guessabi, 2021).

The Importance of Speaking Skill

Communication is crucial in today's global environment for achieving success in all fields. Language is utilized as a communication tool. Without the use of a language, perfect communication is impossible. Furthermore, people cannot attain their ambitions, objectives, or goals unless they communicate effectively. As a result, a language is required to communicate with individuals who live all over the world, because English is considered an international language and is spoken worldwide, it is used to communicate with individuals who live in various countries, regions, and continents (Rao, 2019). Moreover, because speaking is a process of generating meaning, it covers practically all of the language components; therefore, speaking allows people to freely and spontaneously convey their thoughts, and ideas (Sari, 2019).

According to Timmis (2016), the importance of speaking skills appears to be further emphasized by the widespread use of Communicative Language Teaching, a methodology that emphasizes speaking. Everything in today's world is tied to one's ability to communicate, all learners who want to develop their business, build confidence, improve their career, get better job chances, give public speeches, attend interviews, give presentations, engage in debates and group discussions, and so on must have strong speaking abilities (Rao, 2019). Sari (2019) stated that in a real-life situation, students would be rated primarily on their ability to speak, which most people's

initial impressions are based on their ability to communicate clearly and smoothly.

ICT Integration in Oral Performance

The use of technology to effectively communicate in English is the backbone of today's successful learning (Winasih et al., 2019). Eday and Lockyer (2013) also claimed that the ability to use technology should be complemented by the ability to demonstrate and communicate what has been learned. Students acquire meaningful and successful technology use when they can convey their thoughts and ideas effectively in various contexts and objectives. Furthermore, employing modern technology to learn the language is advantageous and helpful. As mentioned in Idayani and Sailun's (2017) study, the majority of students said that using ICTs improved their speaking skills while also increasing their motivation, creativity, and knowledge.

Speaking is an important skill for English language learners to master. In this context, ICT could play a crucial role in improving students' speaking abilities if used correctly and should be integrated into teaching oral expression since it brings the actual world into the classroom. Hence, the usage of technology has a significant impact on EFL students' capacity to communicate both within and outside the classroom (Ghedeir & Nesba, 2019). They noted the advantages of ICT use as follows:

- ⊙ It offers both teachers and learners a wide range of authentic materials of the target language.
- ⊙ ICT motivates students to develop their speaking skills.
- ⊙ It bridges the target language culture with the teaching and learning process.

In the present world, ICT becomes a component to support technology-based blended teaching, which is more effective and responsive. As a result, Information Communication Technology (ICT) establishes itself as a feasible tool for improving the teaching of EFL speaking proficiency (Kavitharaj, 2017).

Techniques of ICT

Incorporating ICT into the teaching/learning process of speaking skills necessitates the use of appropriate teaching techniques to assist students in improving their communication skills. Teachers can teach speaking skills using CD-ROMs (Compact Disk Read-Only Memory) or DVDs (Digital Versatile Disk). Both have a good influence on student performance because they allow them to be exposed to authentic language. If universities and schools have a computer lab, teachers may be able to schedule specific oral expression sessions in which students work independently or in groups with CD-ROM material. Additionally, during the oral expression sessions, students may listen to short segments of DVD dialogues several times before their comprehension is tested and assessed. Chatting can also help students improve their speaking skills, providing that it is carefully prepared for, organized, and timed. It is an important approach to improving students' fluency and accuracy. Using the chat technique, students can gather in pairs or in small groups via social media networks to discuss topics covered in oral expression sessions (Brahim & Nesba, 2022).

Research Question

- I. What are the encountered obstacles and challenges students have faced while using ICT in oral performance?
- II. What are EFL students' attitudes towards ICT integration in oral performance?

Materials and Methods

In this research, a qualitative method is used to identify the students' challenges towards ICT integration in oral performance. 13 second-year EFL undergraduate students participated in conducting semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The general population for this study consists of all second-year students from the English department at Bordj Bou Arreridj University, in which they are 13 undergraduates. The respondents participated in the interview. It should be noted that all students participated in the study on a voluntary and random basis.

Research Instruments

In this study, a qualitative method was employed as an approach. It deals with a semi-structured interview. The interview was used to answer the research questions, and pursue in-depth information about students' challenges. The interview used, was adapted from the interviews, designed by Muslem (2021) and Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020). This latter consists of six (06) items, which ask the respondents about their challenges while using ICT tools in classroom oral performance.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. The study participants were informed at the beginning about the purpose and the objective of the study. It should be noted that all participated on a voluntary basis. A semi-structured interview was scheduled at University of Bordj Bou Arreridj. The meeting was conducted on two different days. The interviewees were 13 second-year English students, randomly selected from different groups. The interview took place in separate classrooms in the English department. The duration for each student's interview ranged between 10 to 15 minutes. First, an interview consent form and questions template were presented and explained to the participants to inform them about the current study and the procedures of the interview, and get their consent to record it via smartphones. Every interview was then transcribed word by word from the original audio records to be analyzed and interpreted. The interview consists of six items. The first item (I1) is concerned with students' learning conditions during the pandemic while using ICTs. The second item (I2) is set to explore students' delivery of their oral performance with the use of communication technologies. Items (I3, I4&I5) seek to investigate students' difficulties and challenges in using ICTs, and how do they improve their oral performance when they face these difficulties, in addition to the factors that caused these difficulties. Item (I6) examines whether or not online learning constitutes an obstacle for students to promote their oral performance.

Data Analysis

As this research is a qualitative research design, the researchers first conducted the qualitative data to follow up with the answers. For the data

analysis, thematic and content analyses were used to identify and categorize reoccurring themes and answers in the qualitative data. The purpose of the semi-structured interview is to find out about the obstacles that EFL students had in their oral performance while using ICTs. The results of the interviews were manually investigated. The researchers colored and labeled the reoccurring themes after transcribing the participants' recordings. In the semi-structured interview, the participants were coded as shown in Table 1. M 12 denotes a male respondent with the number 12 as his interview code. F 5 also denotes a female respondent with an interview number of 5.

Table 1. The Respondents Codes of the Qualitative Study

Gender	Code	Interview number
Male interviewee	(M)	12
Female interviewee	(F)	5

Results and Discussion

Qualitative Results

Students' Challenges towards ICT Integration in Oral Performance

Concerning the second research question, this aimed to find the key challenges that second-year students at Bordj Bou Arreridj University have faced in delivering their oral performance. Based on students' responses four main challenges are found; 1) Technical problems, 2) Lack of experience in using ICTs, 3) Interaction problems between students and instructors, and 4) lack of teachers' training.

Technical Problems

Students indicated that one of the obstacles of ICT use in oral performance was internet problems, they revealed that the Algerian connection is poor, especially for students who live in remote areas, in these conditions students cannot be in connection with the lessons or their teachers, as a result, no oral performance is achieved "...some of us live in remote areas where there is no internet but there is electricity. I mean, the conditions are harsh" (F/7). Besides network issues, some students claimed that they did not have the necessary ICT equipment like computers and smartphones, etc. as stated in a female response;

"I faced challenges while using ICTs; the most important challenge is that I do not have a computer at home in addition to network problems" (F/4).

"I had difficulties using ICT in oral performances. For example, when my phone broke, I could not find another way; I did not study for a while" (F/8).

"I have faced small difficulties like technical errors; since we are the digital generation we are aware of how to use ICT" (M/10).

The same result was observed in the study of Lassoued, Alhendawi, and Bashitialshaaer (2020) who found that one of the challenges in obtaining quality distance learning during the COVID-19 epidemic, according to teachers and students, was the slow internet in many outlying places, which caused broadcast disruptions and made it difficult to follow classes. Another study conducted by Bouguerni and Bouchenak (2021) revealed that 34 percent of respondents said they lacked the requisite ICT equipment to participate in the E-learning program, such as a computer, a smartphone, a modem, reliable internet access, and so on. They also revealed that downloading course materials and participating in live group video discussions is difficult due to slow internet speeds. The interviewees noted that, although being paid for, internet connectivity is frequently unavailable for unknown reasons. Al-Balas et. al. (2020) revealed in their study that poor internet coverage is a common obstacle for E-learning students, with 69.1 percent of students citing it as their main issue.

Lack of Experience Using ICTs

The second main challenge that prevents some students from using ICT tools to improve their oral performance during the pandemic was their limited knowledge and experience of it. Students are unfamiliar with applications as ZOOM, Google Meet, and E-learning platforms. During these conditions, students were not able to engage and develop their oral performance. One of the male respondents said that:

"I did face lots of difficulties: I have a lack of skills in using ICTs; I am not familiar with ICTs, it was hard" (M/ 12).

Another female claimed that:

"Yes, I have a lack of using technology, and the epidemic came suddenly, so the distance learning type was not helpful enough to do the oral performance" (F/7).

"Some students are not familiar with ICT tools but during COVID-19 they were forced to use it" (F/5).

"Lack of knowledge about how to access platforms" (F/9).

The same finding was mentioned in Muslem's (2021) study who found that successful online learning relies heavily on technology. As a result, students must have the ability to use technology, which has become a requirement of learning. Consequently, students who are unable to operate technology will find it difficult to study online. This is also in line with Rababah (2020) who stated from students' responses that they had not been instructed to use platforms, which was the main challenge in their learning in ICT environment; where eight out of twelve of the participants declared that they were unable to use these platforms.

Interaction Problems between Students and Instructors

In light of the aforementioned, the majority of participants declared that during the period of the pandemic, there was a numerous absence of interaction between them and their teachers, due to the fact that they were only studying through PDF, they did not have the chance to talk with their instructors the same as they did in the normal classes. As a female (13) stated:

"There were no ways to improve oral performance because we were only studying from pdfs". And "It was a big change when we start learning using the internet and online learning. I lost touch between the teacher and I, so that made it harder to study especially with PDFs and platforms" (M/3).

From this perspective, we can say that the interaction between students and teachers during the pandemic is less than the interaction in the traditional classroom.

"...We rarely meet teachers, so we cannot speak fluently, and ameliorate our capacities. The teacher just posts some videos in E-learning platform or uses some applications" (F/4).

"My learning conditions while using ICTs were really bad, it was a disaster because the use of ICTs was limited to uploading PDFs from E-learning platform or Facebook groups, also sending our works and tasks via email without any interaction neither with teachers no with each other" (F/5).

"I didn't have a chance to deliver my oral performance to the teacher. However, I tried to improve it on my own by using apps to talk to people like video games, I tried to interfere with people and deliver my oral performance there" (M/ 12).

The same result was encountered in a study conducted by Benadla and Hadji (2021) who found that 75.23 percent of students mentioned that there was no apparent interaction between them and their teachers, in which instruction was reduced to just sending and receiving messages with a few keystrokes. The majority of them agreed that their inability to digest and comprehend the contents given throughout the courses was due to a lack of engagement with their lecturers.

Lack of Teachers' Training

The final challenge that was mentioned by some students is that teachers are not trained enough to teach in online classes. There are some instructors, who are completely untrained to use technological tools, this case created an issue to students during the COVID-19 pandemic, because they could not be in contact with their teachers and increase the value of their oral performance. As a female (5) noted: "and as we all know during COVID-19 we faced a technology chock, especially our teachers, because most of them prefer the traditional way of teaching, so the lack of training constitutes a real problem and challenge",

The same thing was mentioned by another female respondent (2)

"Not all teachers use visual applications to teach us, others did not know how to use these technologies, so they avoid using them" (F/8).

"Teachers did not even use ICTs to improve students' oral performance" (M/3).

The finding of this study is similar to Benadla and Hadji (2021) who found that teachers' lack of technical skills and teaching style are not adapted to the online environment are the main problems. According to their findings, 35.2 percent of teachers were unwilling to develop their online teaching skills; furthermore, 30% of students stated that the primary difficulty was the teachers' inability to adapt to the online environment. In addition, the findings are consistent with Bouguerni and Bouchenak (2021) study which declared that teachers' lack of ICT skills is a challenge encountered by students. 39% of respondents declared that some teachers did not give any content on E-learning platforms or participate in any online learning events

because they do not know how to utilize these new technologies or do not have the requisite resources to engage in E-learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the students' responses, it is concluded that second-year EFL students have positive attitudes and willingness toward ICT integration in oral performance. However, they have encountered certain difficulties, which are classified into four themes based on the students' interview; technical problems, lack of experience in using ICTs, interaction problems between students and instructors, and lack of teachers' training. Students are advised to use ICT tools to support their FL learning process and boost their academic performances in the English Language.

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