Original Research Article

The Usage of Digital Technology in EFL Classrooms: A Study with Lebanese High School EFL Teachers

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Abstract

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This particular study documents the availability of digital technology in the Lebanese English Foreign Language (EFL) secondary classes. Even further, this study attempts to investigate the reasons of not utilizing digital technology to develop students' proficiency level, and why some teachers are not using digital devices in their classroom. To this end, a teacher survey was given to 35 EFL student-teachers completing their Teaching Diploma (TD) in the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Lebanese University, the only public university in Lebanon. The analysis of the quantitative data indicated that secondary EFL student-teachers are not provided with a variety of digital technologies; they are using traditional digital devices in a simple manner; and they are facing some obstacles that are preventing them from using digital technologies at the satisfactory level. Thus, it is recommended to create a practical and professional program for using technology as a cornerstone in all disciplines and domains of secondary education and other cycles.

Keyword: Technology, digital devices, professional development, secondary cycles, student-teachers

INTRODUCTION

Soueid, Ghanem, Hariri, Yamout, and Nehme (2014) indicated that "students' achievement levels in Lebanon are low in comparison to those of their peers in other countries" (p. 25). Based on my observation as an instructor and on my colleagues' feedback, it is found that many of secondary EFL learners in public schools consider that Math, Biology, Physics and Chemistry are more important than the language subjects (Arabic, English and French). In fact, the main reason for this consideration is that the students feel "imprisoned" during the language session. They are just sitting behind their desks, listening to the teacher and filling in some worksheets. Lebanese secondary EFL learners serve as passive receivers since the teacher and the book are the only sources of knowledge, and there is little opportunity to involve in a new educational experience. In order to

produce innovative learners, the students should experience their learning and take responsibility for their learning.

Al-Mahrooqi and Troudi (2014) believed that "for students to achieve the desired proficiency in a foreign language, their institutions need to invest time, effort and huge resources in order to cater different learning styles" (p.1). As educators, the preparation of an interactive and constructivist educational environment should be the central concentration in our lives. In fact, students crave for technology and digital learning tools that are effective, interactive and authentic. Applying digital learning in the teaching practice could transfer the Lebanese public school into a place where students' needs, desires and curiosity to learn are satisfied.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to document the availability of digital technology in the Lebanese EFL secondary classes. Even further, this study attempted to investigate how often EFL student teachers are using digital devices to develop their students' proficiency level, and what obstacles teachers' face when using digital technology in their classroom.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:
1. Are digital technologies available to the secondary EFL student teachers' use in Lebanese public schools?
2. How are secondary EFL student teachers using digital technology outside their classroom?
3. Why secondary EFL student teachers are not using digital technology in their classrooms at the satisfactory level?

Review of the Literature

Jones (2016) stated: "Technology has become our daily companion, and it is hard for our students to envision a life without instant responses from our technology devices" (p. 34). In fact, this progress has given the rise to the integration of technology into educational programs and syllabus. Akyuz and Yavuz (2015) believed that "since technology becomes increasingly prevalent within educational settings, there emerges an expectation for educators to utilize digital tools to support classroom teaching and learning" (p. 766). Moreover, there are several forms of digital technology such as "computers, devices that can be attached to computers (e.g., LCD projector, interactive whiteboard, digital camera), networks (e.g., Internet, local networks), and computer software" (Gray, Thomas & Lewis, 2010, p. 2). Speak Up Teacher Survey (Project Tomorrow, 2013) listed some digital technologies that can be used in the classroom to support students' learning: "3D content, animations, electronic book subscriptions, game-based environments, Google drive for education … online curriculum, online database … online textbooks, podcasts, PowerPoint, Prezis, real-time data (such as: population, weather, NASA, Google Earth, GIS etc), simulations, social media content, software/apps and teaching aids" (Project Tomorrow, 2013, p. 7). Although there are different forms of digital technology nowadays, most of EFL teachers still depend on traditional teaching methods. Hence, instead of utilizing traditional methods, educators should consider the usage of digital learning as a key to create an authentic and innovative classroom atmosphere.

The utilization of digital technology in education has various benefits since it is used to "enable, or make more efficient, effective teaching and learning practices" (Higgins, Xiao and Katsipataki, 2012, p. 4). According to İlter (2015), "children are generally visual learners. They want to see while they are learning" (p. 312). In fact, digital learning considers students' abilities and styles; it "satisfies both visual and auditory senses of the students" (Shyamlee, 2012, p. 150). In addition, "technology in language learning has the potential to positively impact language learners' autonomy and motivation, as well as have a beneficial influence on foreign language (L2) teaching" (Forsythe, 2017, p. 2). One of the characteristics of effective educators is to be "very resourceful and inventive in how they teach their classes" (Walker, 2013, p. 37). Means, and Olson (1997) suggested that:

Teachers can draw on technology applications to simulate real-world environments and create actual environments for experiments, so that students can carry out authentic tasks as real workers would, explore new terrains, meet people of different cultures, and use a variety of tools to gather information and solve problems. (p. 10)

Juniu (2006) is one of the researchers and practitioners who also believed that "educational technology facilitates alternative pedagogical models of guided and reflective inquiry through extended projects that generate complex products and results in the assimilation of information" (p. 71). Furthermore, Lynch (2014) mentioned some advantages of using digital technology in language learning such as: it increases the students' interest in language period; it reduces time needed to learn the language; it creates a challenging and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Using digital technology correctly and effectively, allows the students to be active and independent EFL learners who are able to interact, explain, analyze, reflect, explore, predict and generate new knowledge while reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In fact, Nwokeafor (2015) indicated that in order to integrate the digital technology into teaching-learning process, teachers need to develop their "creativity, flexibility, logistic skills for assigning work and study places as well as grouping students, skills for project work, administrative and organizational skills, collaborating skills, and computer competence" (p. xx). Hence, "the key challenge facing teachers is to refocus their teaching strategies and adopt new approaches, and to effectively and efficiently incorporate technologies into the language learning process" (Živković, 2016, p. 154).

Many research studies were conducted regarding the integration of digital technology in EFL learning process. Yordming (2017) conducted a semi-structured interview to study the "needs including the Internet in teaching and Internet access of school, teachers' confidence to use digital media in the classroom, administrative support for use of technology in classroom, and types of digital

educational tools using in EFL classroom" (p. 45). Five Thai EFL teachers working in an educational office participated in this study. The results indicated that the participants "needed to use the Internet in the EFL classroom, felt confident about digital media using in the classroom, and felt that their school administrators encouraged technology use" (p. 47). Moreover, some digital devices were used in EFL classroom such as laptop, computer, smart board, MS PowerPoint, and the Internet.

Regarding the benefits of utilizing technology in EFL classroom, Wachob (2011) used three activities with undergraduate and graduate students to show how the videos can develop students' autonomy, motivation, performance and critical skills. The main research question for this study was: "What are some kinds of activities that can be implemented and how can teachers use them to enhance teaching, specifically critical thinking skills, motivation and ultimately learner autonomy?" (p. 20). The study started with an activity where the students were supposed to watch a video for self-evaluation using a checklist. While watching the videos, the students were asked to look closely to language control, content and organization, verbal features and non-verbal features. In the second activity, they students watched their peers' video and gave their feedback using a protocol. At last, the students watched "pre and post instruction videos for improvements" (p. 23) using a checklist. The findings revealed that the usage of videos in EFL classroom gave the students an opportunity to experience their learning, increased their motivation and autonomy, and developed their critical thinking skills.

METHODOLOGY

Site and Participants

Thirty five Lebanese student teachers in the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Lebanese University, the only public university in Lebanon, participated in this study during the academic year of 2017-2018. All respondents were females between 24 and 42 years old. They were Teaching Diploma (TD) student-teachers majoring in learning and teaching EFL for secondary cycles. Those learners came from different Lebanese governorates such as South, Nabatieh, Beirut, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon and North.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

A teacher survey was sent to the 35 EFL student-teachers via email in order to fill it out using the link https://goo.gl/L6RPQH. The survey included eight main parts which investigated the student teachers' views and opinions on using digital tools and resources for learning. Moreover, these parts contained 29 multiple choice and checkboxes questions about: (1) demographics, (2) technology, (3) strategic learning, (4) online learning, (5) mobile learning, (6) online assessment, (7) digital content and professional development, and (8) 21st century skills and career exploration (see Appendix A).

Speak Up Teacher Survey was adapted from Project Tomorrow (2013). Speak Up Teacher Survey was adapted from Project Tomorrow (2013). According to Project Tomorrow (2014), Speak up is an annual survey that "represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voices [of K-12 educators] on digital learning" (p. 16).

Therefore, the current study employed quantitative techniques to collect and analyze data. Data collection tools included numeric information (quantitative data) such as Speak Up Teacher Survey (2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The upcoming part presents an examination and analysis of 35 secondary EFL student-teachers' responses obtained from the Speak Up teacher survey.

Figure 1 shows the student-teachers' responses when asked if their students have access to at least one mobile device (tablet, laptop, notebook, digital reader or smartphone) to use in language learning classroom. In Figure 1, 68% of the teachers stated that their students do not have access to mobile devices, but they wish to teach in that kind of classroom; and 42 % of them declared that the students are not provided with mobile devices. While only 5.3 % stated that the students are allowed to use digital devices at school.

For a better understanding of the availability of digital technologies in secondary EFL classrooms, the student-teachers were questioned about the type of digital content that they currently use in their EFL classrooms. The responses in Figure 2 revealed that the highest percents are 84% and 47% which are related to the usage of PowerPoint and teaching aids (lesson plans, interventions, assessment software), respectively. While none of the student-teachers use simulation, podcasts and intelligent adaptive software, and only 5.3 % use online subscription service of digital resources, online curriculum, electronic book subscriptions and 3D content.

Regarding the second research question, secondary EFL student-teachers were asked how they use technology to facilitate or support student learning. The responses in Figure 3 revealed that 63 % of the teachers use technology to create physical models or use pictures to present *knowledge*, and 53 % of them use it for homework and practice. Moreover, 47 % of the EFL teachers utilize technology to create cues, questions or advanced graphic organizers, and to construct the content of language teaching to suit students' needs
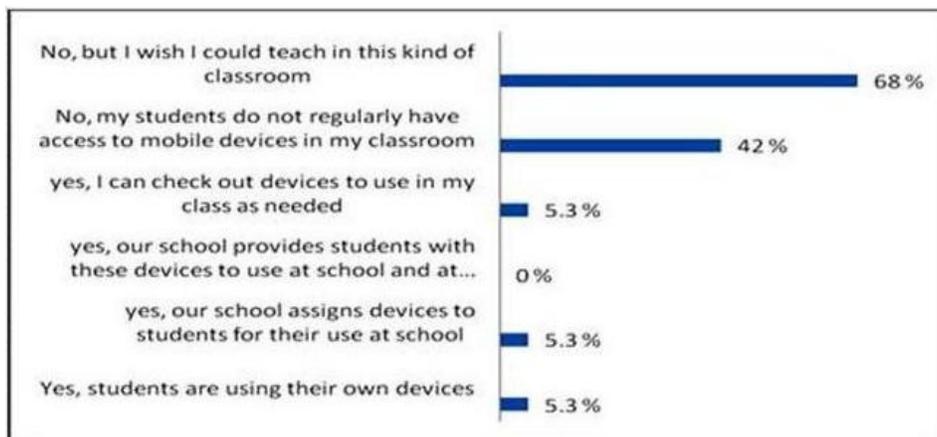
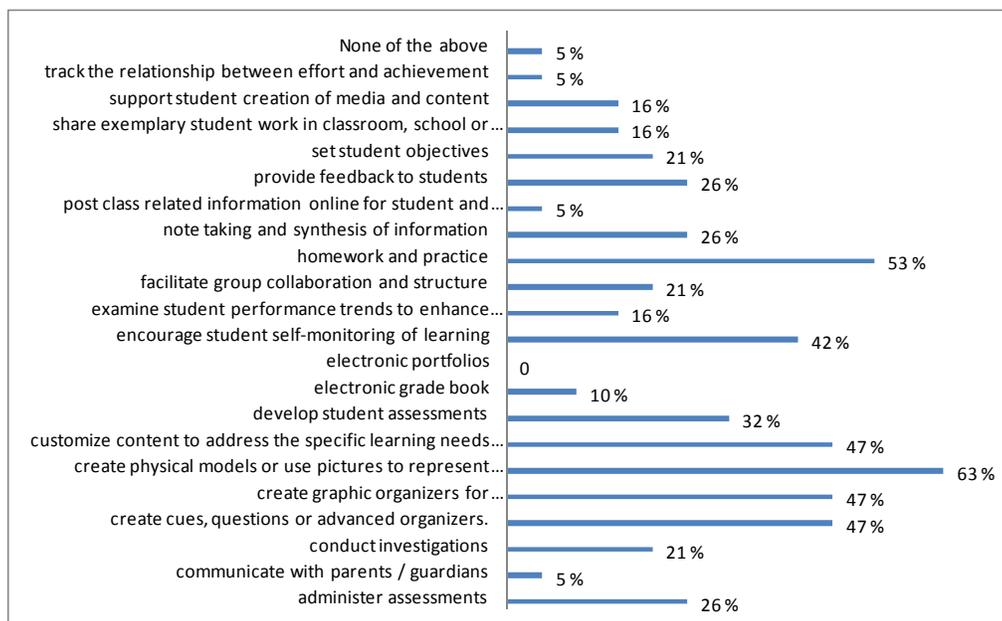**Figure 1.** Availability of Mobile Devices in Secondary EFL Classrooms

Figure 2. Availability of Digital content in Secondary EFL Classrooms
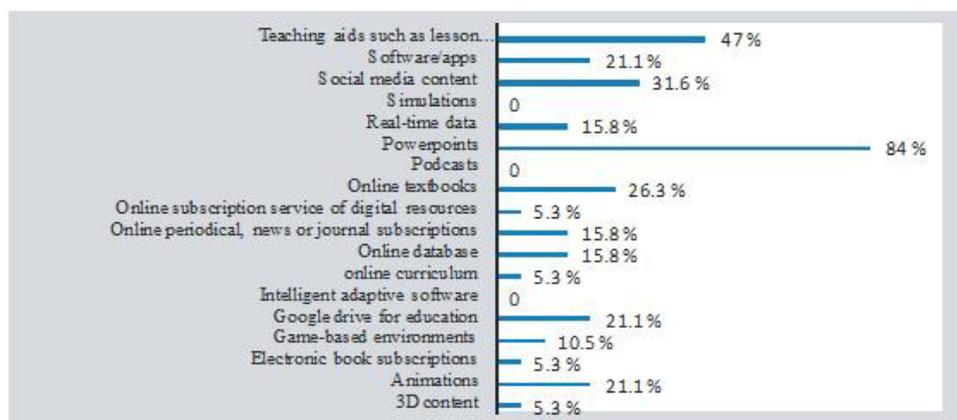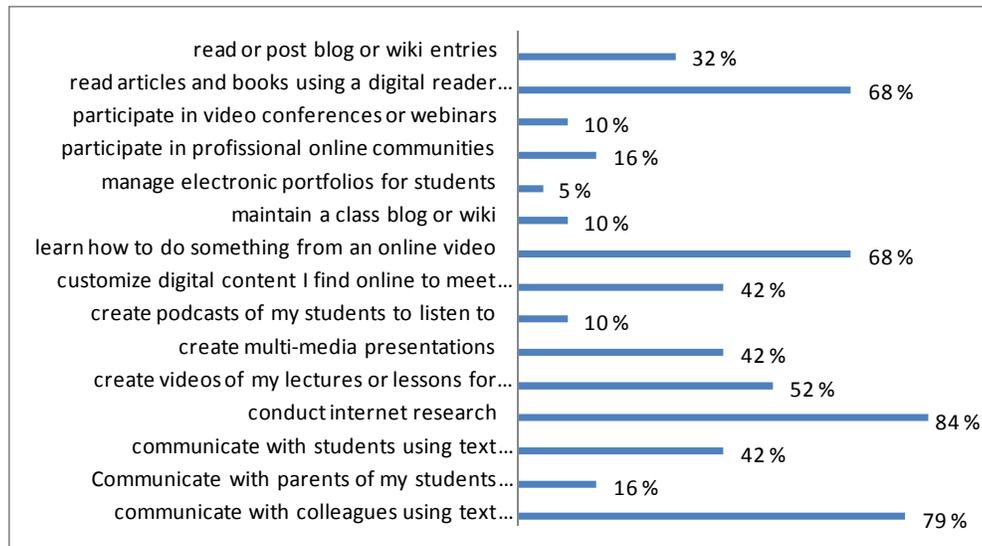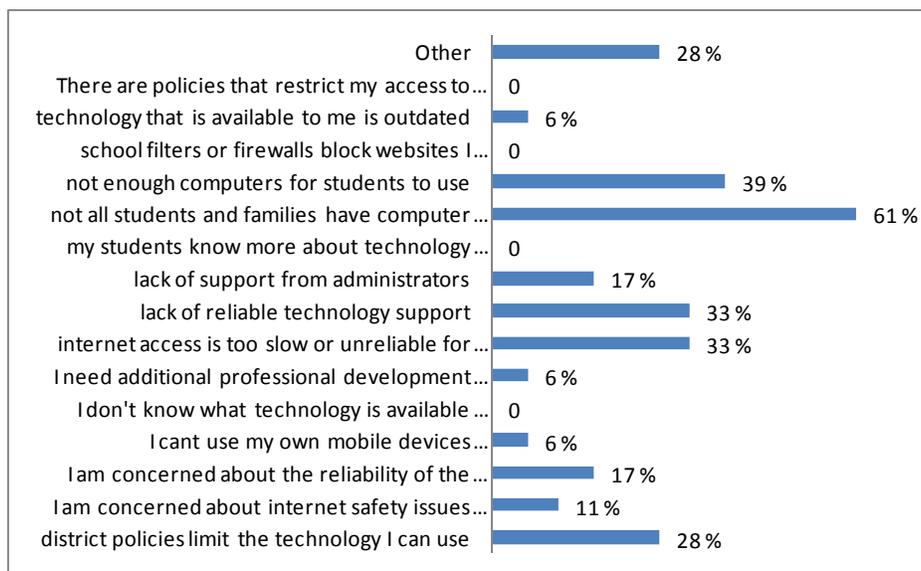
Figure 3. Methods Achieved Using Technology inside Secondary EFL Classroom

Figure 4. Activities Accomplished Using Technology outside the Classroom


Figure 5. Obstacles Faced when Using Technology

and abilities. While none of the student-teachers use electronic portfolios and only 5 % use digital devices to contact students' parents or guardians, to post students' activities and projects for parent access, and to track the relationship between effort and achievement.

Along these lines, secondary EFL student-teachers were also asked to mark the activities that they regularly do using technology for professional tasks. Figure 4 shows that most of the student-teachers use digital technologies outside their classrooms to conduct internet research (84 %); to communicate with colleagues using text messaging (79 %); and to learn how to do something from an online video, and read articles and books using a

digital reader or tablet (68 %). In addition, 42 % of the teachers use text messaging to communicate with students, to create presentations and to customize digital content to meet students' needs.

At last, secondary EFL student-teachers were questioned about the reasons for not using digital technology in their language learning classrooms at the satisfactory level. Figure 5 shows the student-teachers' responses which revealed that most of the students and families have no computer and internet access at home (61 %), which is one of the obstacles they face when using technology in their classroom. Besides that, no enough computers for students to use (39 %), internet access is too slow or unreliable for downloading
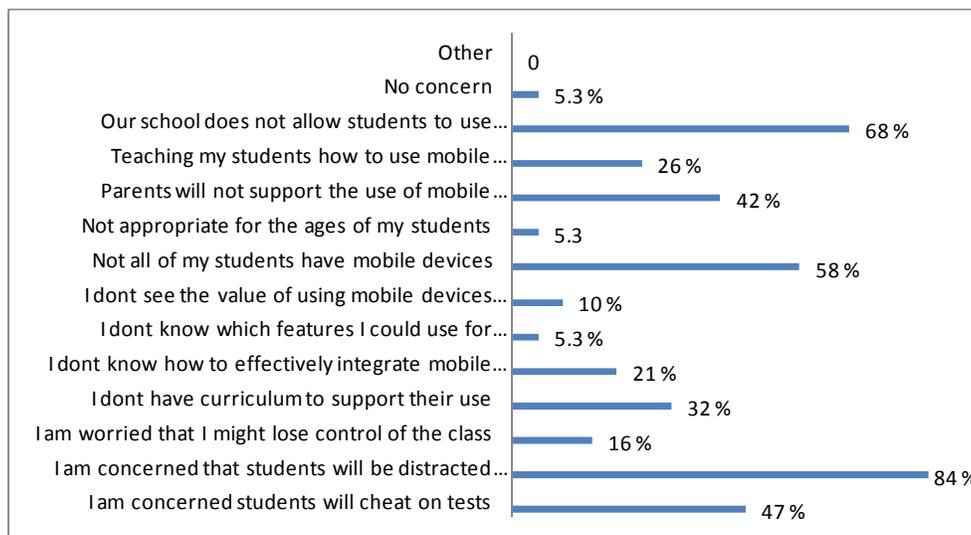
Figure 6. EFL Teachers' Concerns about Using Mobile Devices

digital content, and lack of reliable technology support (33 %).

The student-teachers were then questioned about their concerns about the students' usage of mobile devices in the classroom. The responses in Figure 6 presents that the highest percent is 84 % which shows that student-teachers' biggest concern is that the students will be distracted doing other things such as texting, playing games, and research (84 %). In addition, 68 % of the student-teachers declared that the school does not allow students to use a mobile device that's why they are not able to utilize digital technologies in their classroom. In addition, 58 % of the teachers declared that do not use technology in their classroom because not all the students are equipped with mobile devices, 47 % believed that if they used digital tools in their language learning classroom the students will cheat on tests, and 42 % stated that the parents will not support the usage of mobile devices.

CONCLUSION

The first finding of this study is that secondary EFL teachers have a limited access to digital technologies in the Lebanese public schools. Within the language learning process, student-teachers use traditional digital tools such as PowerPoint and pictures. In fact, the students are not actively engaged in a variety of technological devices. Another finding indicated that secondary EFL teachers use digital technologies inside and outside their classroom in a simple manner such as to send a text message, to watch online videos, to read an article or a book, and to create pictures. The last finding revealed that the secondary EFL student-teachers

and not using digital technology because most of the students do not have internet at their home, and even if they have, the internet access is too slow or unreliable for downloading digital content. In addition, in some schools the students are not allowed to use mobile devices in class because they will be distracted doing other things such as texting, playing games, and research.

Qanwal and Karim (2014) mentioned that English language is a "rich source of information, knowledge and learning throughout the world" (p. 1019). Living in an era of hyper-change drives us to become innovators. In fact, such an environment can raise learners' abilities to make a difference to the world. Digital technologies gives the students a chance to go beyond the classroom and embed in a community whereby they have the ability to take responsibility for their learning, to investigate, to construct new ideas and to evaluate, rather than just sitting behind their desks, listening to the teacher's "facts" and "doing" the task. In fact, "technology is ingrained in all the daily activities of our life, essentially from the moment one rises in the morning until we tuck into bed every night" (Jones, 2016, p. 32). Hence, educators are challenged to design and sustain learning opportunities that allow learners to learn the target language efficiently, and create an interesting and productive atmosphere.

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