

I.C.T: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract: *The present paper reports on a survey conducted on the use of ICT among our master students aimed at gauging their level of communication via a group on Facebook page. The survey results show that there are some students who cannot use adequately PowerPoint due to their low level of English. The results also show that cultural boundaries block the access to the internet to women especially. Furthermore, the access to the internet is limited to those who can afford to pay the highly expensive but too slow connectivity. It was suggested that some of the heat which characterized the initial debate on the accessibility and the speed of the internet in the country should be doubled so that we would not be left behind in the use of the technologies. E-learning- Facebook-Internet speed- Power Point Presentations-Virtual Communication-*

I. Introduction

The use of technology in today's education has become an undeniable tool because of its power to transcend both time and place. Indeed, it has helped to dust off the field of education by bringing upheavals in the teaching / learning process. For one thing, it has helped those learners that have long been marginalized because they are less overt than others. If harnessed, it is plain that this new technology will offer the learners new opportunities for a more dynamic learning experience catered to their needs. They would learn how to rely on themselves through learning skills online, how to transform and present their understanding, how to solve their learning problems, how to be more responsible and more self-confident, in a word to be more and more autonomous. The present paper sheds light on how far our students of master 1 at the University of M. Stambouli Mascara have mastered this technology in their learning process.

II. Making the Most of ICT in Our Teaching

Part of the training in the master degree, "Master 4: didactics of English and Applied Linguistics", is the lecturing done by the learners. In fact, in this training-the training of teachers of secondary school- the learners are required to present lessons. Doing such oral presentations is not new for our learners as they have already presented lessons in L3, not the mention, the different exposes they are required to do during their degree course. However, by oral presentations at this level, it is meant that each student has to present a lesson to his comrades in almost every module. What is new is that the whole class will be evaluated on the basis of those presentations. In other words, the presenter has the obligation to present and explain the content of the lesson. It is not just an expose to be done and that is it.

To facilitate the comprehension of the content, the students are asked to use the power- point in their lectures. Mills (2007) states: "You really can create high-impact, dynamic presentations without the help of a design professional". The use of this tool enables the presenter to stick to the core of his topic and not to digress. Indeed, if the power point is properly used and well manipulated, the learner will stick to the main topic and present his ideas in the right amount of time.

PowerPoint presentations are not delivered haphazardly. As any other teaching activity, they must be rigorously planned so that the audience will follow the flow of ideas that is meant to be conveyed. Power- point presentations follow certain steps that are primordial for their success. The steps to follow when presenting with the PowerPoint could be summarized in what follows.

When presenting a lecture using PowerPoint, the student has to establish a goal for his presentation. He should ponder what his purpose behind that presentation is. Is it to inform and persuade or is it to share and entertain. Next, he has to consider his audience. Professional writers spend considerable time considering their audiences' preferences. Likewise, the presenter-the student- in our case has to analyse his audience's needs and motivations (Mills, 2007). The next step when performing a power-point presentation, is structuring the talk. This structure is in fact a map that the student follows so as to put across a clear message. The absence of this structure will to an inconsistent presentation to an unstructured story. To avoid boredom and fatigue, the learner was invited to spice up his presentation. To Mills (2007), presentations would have more impacts if livened up with anecdotes, stories and the like, even if they have nothing to do with the subject in question. These anecdotes are meant to captivate the audience's attention. These classroom presentations are similar to any other presentations, be it in business or Etc. presentations require repeating. Our student was invited at the very beginning to rehearse what he was going to say. Actors do rehearsing every time they have a role to perform.

Similarly, the more our student rehearses the better. Rehearsing is beneficial. This will give him a sense of confidence. Those students who acquire confidence will deliver a presentation with a personal style. However, those who do not will falter and will deliver uncompressible presentations. A presentation can have the best structured content but if performed weakly, it will be a wasted vain. The last issue to consider when performing such presentations is reviewing and revising. Those who perform better are those who learn from their own mistakes. Revising one's own slides, omitting any redundant information makes the presentation more attractive.

The less adventurous learners may hesitate and ask questions like why using the PowerPoint at all when they can draw upon their old safe method of reading the expose they have prepared beforehand. To this preoccupation, an obvious answer is: why not? Why not taking advantage of the considerable benefits that technology in general and PowerPoint in particular are holding out? The most cited advantage is that PowerPoint allows the presenter not only to gain and to hold the audience's attention, but most of all to engage the listeners in a communication process (Oulton, 2007). PowerPoint assists the audience comprehend complex ideas because of its use of graphs, images and devices of this kind. To the words of Oulton (2007), the PowerPoint helps us retain ideas because it "places ideas into short-term memory, which is clearly a prerequisite for placing ideas into long-term memory". In fact, it was noticed that in two term exams, most of our master students that is 76 % did quite well in answering questions directly linked to the content of the different presentations that their classmates performed with the use of that technological tool namely the PowerPoint.

Oral presentations can be arranged in different ways: individually, in pairs, or in groups of three or more students depending on the importance of the topic and the length of the subject matter. This can also depend on the size of the class, and the aims and objectives that the teacher wants to achieve. Whereas working individually provides learners with autonomy and privacy, and trains them to work independently, working in pairs or groups is highly productive and instills in the learners the value of collaboration and teamwork. It was observed that those who prefer working individually are those who possess a great amount of self-confidence.

This is phrased, oral presentations can be spontaneous or arranged (Otoshi & Heffernan, 2008) .

As an illustration, teachers can ask their students to present a topic closely related to the previous day's lesson in order to emphasize the practice of the language presented in the context of that lesson. Alternatively, students can present a topic of their choice as part of a speaking exercise. This can be done spontaneously or in an arranged manner. In the former case, the students can be asked by the teacher, as he or she walks into the classroom, to present without prior arrangement. In the latter case, the students can be asked to treat the topic as homework and plan for and prepare it carefully at home and present it the following day.

There was one student who raised the issue of such presentations. He argued that if the best student grasped 80% of the content of his presentation. Because of his limited experience in presenting, 20% of the content is going to be missed. So at best, the good student in the group will grasp 60% of the whole lesson; while the not-so-good student will understand 40% of the entire content.

This peculiar speculation made me ponder on how to remedy this weakness. Indeed, how the lectures are presented by the students is another issue. Master students are accustomed to use the power point in their presentations. In fact, it will help you stick to your topic on the one hand. On the other hand, it allows the learners (the audience) to have a plain idea of the topic in progress.

Though they have seen models of presentation done at the beginning of the term by teachers, master students have their own ways of presenting. The majority of the class –if not all- just copies and pastes chunks of text on slides. They then read the slides to their friends. The slides are so overloaded with significant ideas that the whole class spends most of the time writing the content.

Some of the students are good at rote learning. They learn whole texts by heart when presenting. This creates difficulties for their friends because they speak fast and if they are asked to explain the idea they just repeat what they have said previously.

It was observed that there was a great solidarity between the students. They help each other in the learning process. They also help each other in the process of evaluating each other in front of the teacher. For instance, they claim that everything clear in the classmate's presentations. To control such behavior, the teacher includes questions of the final exam from these presentations. Once this is made plain clear, it was observed that students were bombarding each presenter with load of pertinent questions.

There are instances where the student presents a slide, reads the slide and turns to the teacher: "sir, if you can clarify this idea." There are those who present slides and ask their students to read the content. They even ask their friends what they have understood. The strategy here is the best defense is the attack, so to speak. In other words, fearing questions from their mates, they prefer asking questions to be asked. This strategy does not work all the time because when the students fail to answer the question, the presenter is supposed to provide the final answer which is –as it was observed-not always the case.

There are instances where the students interrupt their slides and start explaining their ideas, give examples to illustrate the idea and even debating points to which they disagree. These are but the more able

students. These students spend time preparing their presentations making sure of understanding obscure points with the help of their peers and the teacher.

III. Remedy

With this kind of lecturing and teaching, there appear various difficulties, which can be summed up mostly in the fact that the students do not understand wholly what they present to their friends. Add to this, the style of presenting mixed with a huge amount of stress will only make matters worse. As a remedy to all these difficulties, a web page was created on Facebook for the master degree, “Master 4: didactics of English and Applied Linguistics”.

Why a Facebook page? I remember the piece of advice Hibbert gave to Joseph Anton in “Joseph Anton A Memoire” by the English writer Salman Rushdie

...you must never write history” Hibbert said, “ until you can hear the people speak”..... If you didn't have a sense of how they spoke you did n't know them well enough, and so you could nt -you shouldn't - tell their story. The way people spoke, in short , clipped phrases, or long, flowing rambles, revealed so much about them: their place of origin, their social class, their temperament, whether calm or angry, armhearted or cold-blooded, foul-mouthed or clean spoken, polite or rude;and beneath their temperament, their true nature, intellectual or earthy, plainspoken or devious, and, yes, good or bad. (2012:49)

Facebook is the place where our learners communicate so why not using this site to learn. Why not making the most of this page to help our master students communicate and share their tentative slides. It is hoped that in the long run, students will benefit from this web page because they will expand their sharing to the other modules they have.

The sole aim of this web page was to enable the students to make the most of the lectures in research methodology and assessment. On the web page, the lectures are uploaded right after being presented. This way, instead of writing the lectures during the sessions as they were accustomed to do, the students will listen, take notes, ask questions on items that are not clear and so forth. It is hoped that this page will give an opportunity to the less overt students to express themselves. It is also hoped that while chatting with each other on the content of the lectures the students will develop both their oral and writing skills. Eberspächer, (2010) states that if ICT is used as a basis for interesting, meaningful and communicative activities, it can effectively stimulate learners' skills in using both spoken and written language.

This page was also created to promote the idea of sharing between the learners. For this sake, books were uploaded to promote the learning process in the two above-mentioned modules namely research methodology and assessment. This will allow the students to have all that is needed, when it is needed and at any time, he thinks it is required.

This page is also a means for the students to be in continuous contact with each other and with the teacher too. In fact, the requests I have received were mainly about help of a book because the student has a lesson to present in another module.

IV. How to protect the web page

There must be rules for the success of a web page. The rules that were implemented to this page were meant to preserve and enrich it and at the same time to gear it towards a more entertaining role. The first and most significant rule is that the only language that must be used is English. This will compel the students to make efforts express themselves and share both their ideas and their concerns in this language. In the long run, this will only enhance students' style of writing and communicating. Before writing any comment, students are seen making efforts to writing clear questions and correcting themselves (sometimes even seeking peers' assistance) before publishing it on the web page.

A teacher remains a teacher even outside the classroom setting. To the mistakes that students make when asking for clarification or when commenting on their mates ideas, the researcher sends messages on private. This is done so as not to inhibit the students and discourage them from participating in this enterprise.

This web page is sought to help students in their studies and to urge the students to share their inquiries, their experiences in learning, their difficulties and above to express themselves vis a vis the different lectures of this master. This can only be achievable if the members of the group know each other. Some students-especially girls- prefer remaining anonymous because of some cultural reasons. In the end, the administrator of the page will not know who says what. Being anonymous, some students may go too far. In my experience, some students argued about the bad marks they had had in their exams. Therefore, knowing each member of the group helps the administrator to refocus the debates.

The next rules are ethical. First of all, members are exhorted to listen to or to read what their friends say or write. There must be a coherent discussion around an idea. Everyone is free to express himself provided that he respects his mates' points of view. Moreover, participants in this web page-even if those who belong to

other universities- are told that there is no wrong idea as such but as in the technique of brainstorming, any idea can generate other ideas and by the same token enrich the debate.

This said, debates cannot be enriched unless participants respect their mates' ideas. Members of this group must treat people fairly. They must neither reject their friends' ideas nor put them down. Furthermore, it is the ideas that should be criticized not the person. The aim is to give a chance to the less-able students to voice an opinion.

Members of this group are by no means football referees. It is all right if they change their minds and admit their mistakes. Students are encouraged to debate their ideas provided that they accept the wrongness of their thinking and henceforth of their conclusions. With this state of mind, the students will think together, work together to find solutions to their inquiries. The role of the teacher remains the most paramount because he is going to monitor the whole business to ensure the learning process is accompanied with tolerating the other's way of thinking.

V. Problems in Promoting the Use of ICT

In the last 2 decades, more than 2 billion users are connected to the internet due to the success of the communication technologies. To have an idea of how far our students are connected, I administered a questionnaire of six items.

Item 1: Out of the 35 students of master 4, 25 students that is 71% have a computer. Out of these 25 students, 13 that is 52% have a personal computer.

Item 2: out of the 35 students, 16 that is 45% have access to the internet at home. The rest does not have even a line or cannot afford paying for the internet connectivity.

Item 3: out of the 35 students, 15 that is 43 % have a Facebook account that they visit every day and they visit the Master 4 web page every time there is a new post or when they want to ask questions. There are instances where the female students are connected but they don't like Facebook. One of the student said I used to have one when I was single.

As far as the web page is concerned, some of the students express the wish of generalizing it to the other modules. Others wanted to the teacher to ask questions on the comprehension. Still others think that the members are too passive.

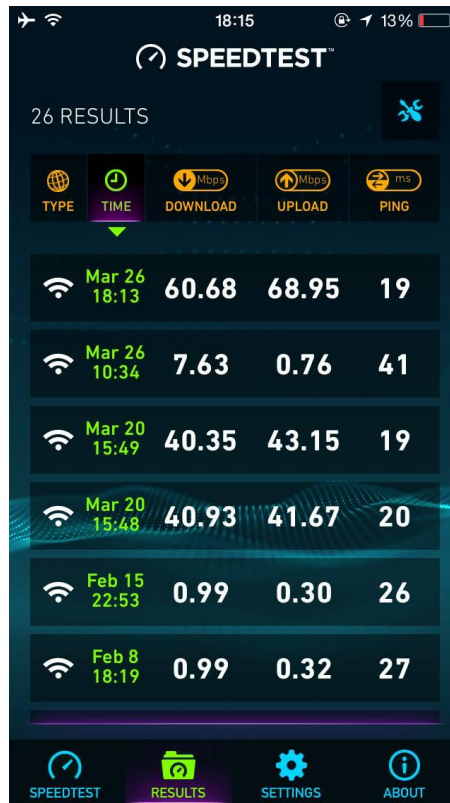
VI. Conclusion

We have observed the passivity of many introvert students in the discussions that took place on this web page. To stimulate discussion, we have raised our students' perception of ways of discussing a point with ones' mates. To do so we have hinted at how to develop their skills in using exploratory talk (Mercer et al., 2007:14) rather than just ask questions. The students are encouraged to take part in the discussions to enrich the activity rather than being merely an optional or incidental participant. From the very beginning, some activities were designed so as to encourage cooperation between the students rather than competition.

Some students were passive because the activity was too demanding; so demanding that the majority do not dare take part in. Indeed, the activity should be challenging enough to stretch students but within the limits of their potential achievement. To structure any debate, we made clear to the students that they should start with a clear, shared understanding of both the point and the purpose of the scheduled activities, including why they are being asked to talk and work together.

The research has brought to the open the sour truth that despite the great upheavals that the modern digital technologies have induced, the majority of our learners are left way behind. This goes in consistency with Von Braun (2010:11) when states that the poor are left way behind. From our survey research, we found that despite the promises heard here and there on T.V channels or shouted by many politicians, the majority of our students are excluded from the social network in general and from the use of the internet in particular. This is due to two main reasons: the geographical situation of these people and the expenses of the internet, which remain above the expenses of these people. When people do not have enough food to eat or decent clothes to wear, talking of internet will appear ill considered. Such people - in the area of Mascara at least- especially those dwelling in remote places cannot afford the expenses of a telephone line, let alone the expenses of the internet.

Those who have the "chance" to enjoy having in the internet at home will sooner or later be disappointed even irritated to the slowness of the internet speed. This latter not only handicaps any communication but renders the files downloading or uploading impossible. With this kind of speed, it is almost inconceivable to think of generalizing and promoting the process of learning and researching with the use of ICTs. The picture below shows an example of the internet speeds in some European countries namely France and Norway compared to our own. The highest are the European. The reader sees that the difference between the two speeds are utterly gigantic. Such difference renders most of us skeptical of the idea that one day we will have an internet like these ones.



This situation has left our students hungry for a “decent” internet speed that would give access to education, information and above all to communication between students and students and between and students and teachers being in the first place their teachers, tutors or even their supervisors. Communicating and exchanging e-books, of even video of lectures is a potential tool of learning and teaching that is enhanced by a good internet speed. By the same token, e-learning institutions and virtual universities could easily be created to promote cheap distant learning. The African Virtual University and the Indira Gandhi National Open University are the two most cited examples of virtual universities that provide educations programs through virtual classrooms and video and audio lectures. Consider the significant savings that such services provide for the poor students who live in rural remote areas. To have a plain picture of the huge potential of such enterprises, the Indira Gandhi National Open University has 140 distance education institutes that are reaching out to two million students in India and 33 other countries while the African Virtual University is the largest network of open distance and e-learning institutions in 27 African countries (Von Brawn, 2010:7-8).

We can have access to an attractive internet speed in the country only when certain prerequisites have to be put in place. First and foremost, the ministry of telecommunication has to prompt deregulation among the internet providers. This deregulation will promote fair and effective competition among the internet providers to provide affordable Internet access to billions of people living on the lower levels of the income pyramid. Fair competition, in its turn will automatically lower the price and extend the speed of the internet. Fair competition as opposed to the monopoly of one provider to the national market will urge the internet providers to use the new technologies that will help extend the connectivity and develop its speed while lowering the expenses.

There is a great deal of work to be done because we are really left behind. Before talking about the benefits of modern technology, every Algerian especially those living in remote places must gain access to the internet. To do that, the adequate infrastructure deployment and service delivery have to be realized so that the usual problem of connectivity would be solved once for all.

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