Attitudes towards Digitalizing Literature in EFL Classes of Biskra University-Algeria

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Abstract:

Due to the declining interest in reading the hard copy of books, literature teachers face difficulties teaching literary texts written in English. In this paper, we stress the current situation of the literature classes and the necessity to motivate the students of English Language at Biskra University to study literature by exploring the role of technological advances that provide literary texts in a digital form of hypertexts and electronic books downloaded or accessed through their smartphones or personal computers. Integrating technology in EFL literature classes will motivate teachers and students of literature to perform better in understanding, evaluating, and analyzing digital literary texts.

Keywords: digital literature; technology; teaching literature; hypertexts; e-books.

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1. Introduction:

In all fields of sciences, technological advances have rapidly expanded in details of the human lives. As a result, scholars in education field are calling for practical research-based evidence to investigate the impact of these great evolutions on the performance of teachers and students as well. Schrum (2010) noted that the wider accessibility of technology tools has resulted in wider usages. Teachers and practitioners have to consider such advancements and relate them to the teaching and learning process to cope with the rapidly evolving world. Technology provides the next generations with the needed tools and resources to access and attain the expected skills for a modern society.

Despite the fact that the use of technology in education is now crucial all over the world, especially due to the circumstance of the Corona Pandemic, it is still less ordinary to be integrated in schools and educational institutions in Algeria where access as well as training regarding technology tools seem to be absent. Literature teaching as part of the English syllabus is not excluded. Due to the traditional approaches used extensively in the teaching of literature in the Department of English of Biskra University, it can be assumed that technology is not incorporated in the teaching process, which is too teacher-centered.

Therefore, the present study aims mainly at the investigation of the status of technology integration in teaching the literature component in the Department of English language. The study examines the literature teachers' and their students' use of technology and their attitudes towards technology integration in the literature classes. The present study seeks to attain the following aims:

1. Spotting the light on the techniques used by teachers in teaching literature,
2. Exploring the teachers' and the students' attitudes towards using technology in teaching and learning literature,
3. Expecting the future impact of technology integration on teaching literature in English language classes

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hypertext: a historical overview

Hypertext fiction dates back to the first hypertext fiction piece in 1987, *Afternoon, a story* before World Wide Web was invented created by Michael Joyce. Meanwhile, Storyspace and Hypercard are also hypertext fiction pieces which were written in softwares. Sarah Smith's *The King of Space* and Stuart Moulthrop' s *The Victory Garden* are also a series of pieces that were published by Eastgate Systems company which make them open and free to the public in 1993.

Writers could share their hypertext fiction pieces using the system of interlinked documents with individuals online. Robert Arellano's *Sunshine 69* published his first hypertext fiction novel.

2.3. Technology pedagogical content knowledge approach

In this study, we departed from the technology pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) approach that was depicted by Koehler and Mishra (2009) as a practical approach for integrating technology and the project based learning (PBL) approach as a suitable environment for technology integration. Both the teachers and their students need to set clear goals and objectives. The TPCK approach was first established by Koehler and Mishra (2009) as an attempt to develop the understanding of teaching with educational technologies. Main scholars showed in their studies of teachers' application of technology that this latter is not always well integrated across

curricula as it is considered to be pedagogically unsophisticated and limited in strength, variety and depth (Cuban: 2001; Earle: 2002; McCrory-Wallace: 2004; Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon & Byers: 2002). They assume that approaches like the software-focused initiatives, demonstrations of sample resources and lessons and projects concentrate on the educational technology being used rather than the students' learning needs and give little credit to two key domains which are content and pedagogy.

According to these scholars, the application of educational technology must include more than the tools used in teaching to involve content and pedagogy (Harris, Mishra, & Koehler: 2009, p. 3), as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1. The TPCK approach
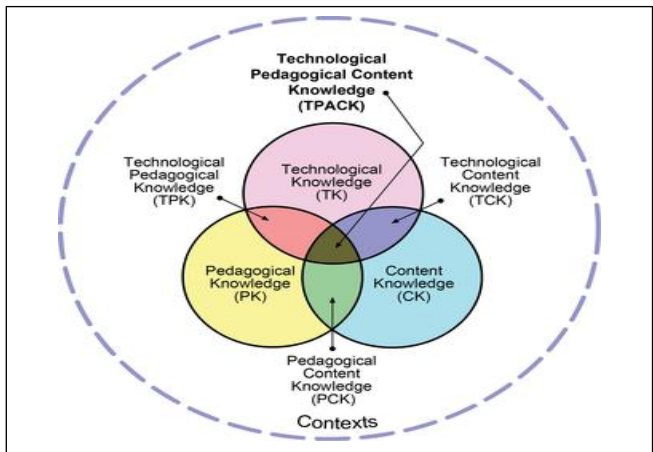
Source: Koehler, M. J., & Mishra, p. 2009

The TPCK framework describes how teachers' understandings of technology, pedagogy, and content, can interact with one another to produce effective discipline-based teaching with educational technologies" (Harris, Mishra, & Koehler: 2009, p. 4). They introduce

the TPCK framework as three interdependent components of teachers' knowledge:

> 1. *Content knowledge* which is related to the knowledge about the actual subject matter that is to be learnt or taught in the classroom (Shulman, 1986).

> 2. *Pedagogical knowledge* that comprehends the deep knowledge that a teacher should be competent to use techniques or methods to in the classroom, the nature of the target audience, and the strategies followed in evaluating learners' understanding of the subject matter (content).

> 3. *Technological knowledge* which recommends the understanding of information technology (ICT) that enables a learner or a teacher to apply it productively and daily.

TPCK is multiple interactions among content, pedagogy and technology. If an educator isolate or ignore any component, learning will be definitely insignificant. Learning about technology is then more different than learning what to do with it instructionally, and does little to help teachers develop knowledge about how to use technology to teach more effectively, or how to help students to meet particular curriculum content standards using technologies appropriately (TPCK) in their learning (Harris, Mishra, & Koehler: 2009, p. 11). On the other hand, teachers must know that there is no specific technological solution that can function equally well for every class, course or pedagogical approach. In this sense, an understanding of the complex manner in which all three domains co-exist, co-constrain and co-create each other is recommended, so teachers have to develop fluency and cognitive flexibility.

Many scholars have considered this approach to be a productive medium for technology integration and efficacy in teaching as well as learning. In another side, project based learning (PBL) which was set by many scholars is an instructional model (Grant: 2002; Jones, Rasmussan & Moffit: 1997; Stoller: 1997; Thomas: 2000; Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson: 1991) that implies the following:

➢ An in-depth investigation of the topic under study.
➢ Stimulating higher level thinking skills by involving the students in performing projects using what they have learnt and creating their own meaningful products.
➢ Using authentic content and assessment.
➢ Involving the students in design, problem solving and decision making by exposing them to challenging authentic problems or questions.
➢ Learner-centered, as the teacher's role is facilitation and not direction.
➢ Developing learners' autonomy and motivation.

This approach is obviously appropriate to 21st century learning that uses authentic tools and resources, including technology. Accordingly, the current study used both approaches to ensure efficient technology integration in the literature classroom, especially after the global pandemic COVID-19.

3. Research Methods
3.1. Sample

The research subjects were (N=5) teachers of English language and literature in the Department of English at Biskra University. In addition, (N=30) Master I students took part in the present study. The teachers of the English are mainly full time teachers who are either doctors or PhD candidates mainly in literature studies. Yet, M1

students have studied three years or *four years (classical system) for their License Degree (BA).*

3.2. Research tools

Based on the mixed approaches to human scientific research, we selected to conduct two questionnaires with literature teachers and their students. The questionnaires examined their uses and attitudes towards technology integration in teaching and learning literature. The questionnaires examined the status of their technology use rating their familiarity with some technological tools and identifying their attitudes towards using technology in different situations. An open-ended question about their own views regarding using technology was provided for more generalized results.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data was collected from the classrooms of Master I level in the Department of English language. In other hand, Microsoft Excel was used to encode the data and keep an observable record of the findings, and then it was projected in forms of tables.

4. Research results

4.1. Technology tools used in literature classes of Biskra University

Table 1 hardware and software technology used in English language classes during the pandemic

Subject	computer	mobile	Slide-show	
Students	15	30	10	
Teachers	5	5	1	
Subject	hypertexts	electronic books	Facebook group	Moodle platform
Students	1	3	30	28
Teachers	5	5	5	5

As it is obvious in table 1, both students and teachers reported their use of higher technology tools: hardware and software. The use of the mobiles in learning English is the highest for both teachers and students, yet the computer and slideshow are of less interest for the students if it is compared to the teachers. For the software package, both students and their teachers do confirm their extreme use of Facebook groups and Moodle platform to upload and download e-lessons and e-lectures handouts. However, the less familiar software packages for students are hypertexts and electronic books. Hence, the students do not use them to access the main literature pieces that they are supposed to study.

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4.1. *Literature Teachers' Implementation of Technology*

Literature teachers reported that they never asked their students to perform projects, create web pages or blogs, provide charts and pictures, or use electronic books and hypertexts to get access to the unavailable printed literary texts. Only one of the five literature teachers reported that she asks students to produce videos once or twice per semester. It is obvious; however, that the extent of technology use during the pandemic is higher for uploading and downloading the handouts prepared by literature teachers. In other words, using digital tools is limited to Facebook Groups and Moodle Platform, yet the electronic interaction using hypertexts, project oriented classroom, online discussion and e-books are of less interest due to the less equipment and less training among the teachers and the students as well.

4.2. *Literature Teachers' Attitudes towards Technology Integration in the post-COVID era*

Examining the questionnaire results, the teachers have shown highly positive attitudes towards the implementation of technology in the process of teaching the literature component. All teachers strongly agreed on the role of technology integration in developing autonomous and communicational learning habits among the students as it enhances their engagement and motivation. Furthermore, the technology tools always render information more attainable and memorable as it is presented in terms of audio, visual or even kinesthetic material, according to the data presented. They also agreed that using technology will facilitate the teaching task by contributing

to prepare, plan and present the content under study, saving them much time and effort in the process.

However, the teachers have demonstrated that there are many problems facing them when trying to use technology tools in the classroom. Classes are not always equipped with the necessary tools to enable them to integrate technology effectively. Some of them do not use technology in the classroom as they think it might be an effective source of distracting students rather than engaging them in learning. Their limited understanding of how to use these technological tools properly to attain educational goals is a very prominent barrier. They estimate that the educational institutions have to reconsider the process of teaching and learning the literature component to be authentic and relevant to the current situation by providing necessary technological equipment and teacher training. This latter is related to developing technology and web skills among the teachers as well as students.

4.3. Literature Students' Attitudes towards Technology Integration

Table 2 Students' Attitudes towards Technology Integration

Nº	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1.	I find it really necessary to use technology in literature classes of English	27	3
2.	Using Interactive hypertexts and e-books facilitate our access to literature pieces and enhance our achievement	26	4
3.	Having downloadable e-books in my smartphone encourages me to read extensively.	26	4
4.	Having a classroom website will motivate me to be autonomous in building knowledge in literature	25	5
5.	Participating in online discussion groups with my classmates and teachers can be interesting and effective to promote our skills of literary texts analysis	25	5
6.	I find it beneficial to search for critics and resources online.	29	1
7.	Performing online projects related to the subjects to be studied makes it more comprehensible.	28	2
8.	Teacher's help while using technology is very interesting	22	8
9.	Using Facebook pages and groups helps in building a literature classroom community and develop team working and collaboration	27	3

The students have shown positive reactions regarding the implementation of technology, and this is clear in Table 2 where the attitudes of (N=30) students towards certain statements are presented. It is important to highlight the students' highly positive attitudes towards the use of PBL in learning literature. (N=28) students found it more helpful to perform online projects and produce artifacts of their own reflecting on what they have learnt. This result provokes teachers

to change their teaching techniques and give students the chance to be more productive, creative and critical thinkers.

4.4. Approaches Used in Teaching Literature in English Language classes

Obviously, it is highlighted that traditional approaches to teaching literature are used extensively including the information-based approach and the literature as a content approach. These two approaches are teacher-centered and allocate less credit to the students' needs, interests and different learning styles. Using such approaches implies that there is no actual interaction, collaboration, discussion, and group work or classroom community among the students. Literature is then taught as content and a piece of information that the students should know about. It does not allow them to reflect on what they perceive of the literary texts under study. Accordingly, there were no tasks specified to indulge the students in an actual practice in the classroom or even online. The only way of assessment was the verbal response to assess the students' engagement which was obviously poor. On these premises, it is important to report that less technology is used while teaching the literature component; it is restricted to uploading and downloading e-handouts for the lessons and lecture via Facebook and Moodle Platform.

5. Discussion of results

The results have shown that teachers of literature use traditional approaches in their classrooms. The main aims for teaching literature courses in the English curriculum includes only linguistic and cultural aims neglecting the poetic, aesthetic and personal enrichment goals of teaching literature. It should be noted that the teachers should be aware that traditional approaches are no longer effective in a 21st century learning process and especially due to the

global crisis of Covid-19 pandemic. However, the students have reported that integrating technology in their classes would make them more motivated to learn about the subject matter. This is to stress the need to use more student-centered approaches to teaching literature on the light of technological advances using electronic resources.

In this regard, the present study assured that technology is the suitable environment for attaining students' autonomy as they can reflect on what they have learnt using blogs, hypertexts electronic books, and other software and hardware package. Without neglecting the online project based class which enable students to discuss and share their own thoughts and ideas about the literary works.

Relating the students' results to those reported by the literature teachers, it is obvious that there is a distance between the teachers' skills and the students' needs and interests. The students showed higher uses of technology than the teachers, which assert the formers' call for applying technology-integrated teaching strategies when teaching the literature component. Although teachers try to cope with the situation, especially during the pandemic even when they use technology in their classrooms they apply their traditional techniques, not being consistent with student learning outcomes. This is proved through the results showing the high use of technology by teachers for instruction using Moodle platform and Facebook groups while it is never used to address the students' use inside the classroom and their products. Nevertheless, most of the students reported that they need the teacher's help while using technology.

6. Conclusion

The results of the research refuted the teachers' low use of technology being afraid of it as a source of distraction. All the results

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accumulated from the students' use and teachers' attitudes towards learning through technology in addition to the case study proved that technology is more beneficial and effective than harmful. By the end, the results manifested the great contribution of student-centered strategies in developing their autonomy and motivation as well as engaging them in the learning process in literature classes using technology in teaching literature and applying project-based learning. Technology in teaching literature is humbly manifested in Literature classes of Master I, and it requires overhauls to cope with the present situation, especially for the post-pandemic era. Moreover, the call for teachers' professional and self-development regarding educational technologies is highly recommended.

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