

Exploring Effective English Teaching Methods: A Comprehensive Analysis of Second-Year EFL Middle-School Pupils

استكشاف الطرق الفعالة لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية:
تحليل شامل لتلاميذ السنة الثانية من الطور المتوسط

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Abstract

The present study provides an in-depth description of the current instructional approach employed by Algerian teachers in middle schools. It explores the specific methods adopted by these instructors during their English language teaching practices with EFL second-year pupils. By examining their teaching techniques, materials, and classroom activities, this research shed light on the innovative and contemporary approaches being implemented in the local educational context. The findings demonstrated that the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) was the most deployed. It also delivered a better understanding of the instructional landscape and derived valuable insights for improving English language education in middle schools.

Keywords: Competency-Based Approach; EFL learners; Algerian instructors; middle schools; teaching English.

الملخص

تقدم الدراسة الحالية وصفا متعمقا للنهج التعليمي الحالي الذي يستخدمه المعلمون الجزائريون في المدارس المتوسطة. ويهدف إلى استكشاف الأساليب المحددة التي اعتمدها هؤلاء الأساتذة خلال تدريسهم للغة الإنجليزية مع تلاميذ السنة الثانية من التعليم المتوسط. أثناء فحص تقنيات التدريس والمواد وأنشطة الفصول الدراسية، سعى هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على الأساليب المبتكرة والمعاصرة التي يتم تنفيذها في السياق التعليمي المحلي. أظهرت النتائج أن نهج التقارب بالكفاءات (CBA) كان النهج الأكثر تداولاً؛ كما قدم فهماً أفضل للمشاهد التعليمي واستمد رؤى قيمة لتحسين تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس المتوسطة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نهج التقارب بالكفاءات؛ تلاميذ EFL؛ الأساتذة؛ مدارس طور المتوسط؛ تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English holds a significant position in today's world by being a widely recognized global language that serves as a primary medium for international transactions and a prevalent choice for people fostering foreign endeavours. Within the Algerian curriculum, English is integrated as a subject from primary schools to Universities preparing learners for effective communication by opening doors to new scientific advancements and keeping abreast of cutting-edge technologies.

In the classroom setting, teachers shoulder a pivotal role and are often the sole source of knowledge for learners who are newly introduced to a foreign language. Their principal objective is to facilitate the acquisition of English language skills and captivate learners' attention to actively engage in lessons. To achieve this, instructors have to establish a set of teaching techniques that ensure a dynamic and stimulating learning environment. By employing various teaching methodologies, instructional resources, and interactive activities, teachers strive to create an engaging and enriching learning environment.

In light of this token, the present research investigates the role of teachers in the process of learning English by exploring their instructional strategies, teaching techniques, and approaches that empower learners to develop a more accurate and natural English language performance. The main scrutinized problem centers on identifying the key features that contribute to the effectiveness of English language teaching. Furthermore, this enquiry seeks to underscore the importance of moving beyond rote memorization and toward a vigorous and interactive approach to language learning.

2. Methods and Approaches in Teaching English

This section explores the various methods and approaches that have shaped the teaching of English over the years. From ancient times to the present day, the subdivisions delve into the rich history of language instruction and examine the evolution of teaching methods.

2.1 The Grammar Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is a traditional approach that has been widely used throughout history. This method places a strong emphasis on the study of grammar rules and the translation of sentences between the target language and the mother tongue. In GTM, the teacher typically presents grammatical rules and vocabulary lists where students are expected to memorize them. The focus is on understanding the structure of the language and translating sentences from one language to another. Written exercises, such as translating passages and completing grammar drills, are commonly used to reinforce learning. As defined by Richards and Rodgers;

a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge through the task of translating sentences and text into and out of the target language .

(2000: 03)

One of the main goals of this method is to develop reading and writing skills, as the emphasis is on understanding and producing written texts. It strengthens students' consolidation of grammatical structures, improves their reading comprehension, and translation abilities. It also provides a structured and systematic approach to language learning. On the other hand, speaking and listening skills received less attention. Concerning the classroom environment, it is often teacher-centered, with the teacher playing a dominant role in delivering information and correcting errors. Learners are likely to listen and take notes, and participation is generally limited to answering questions or reciting memorized phrases.

Nevertheless, the grammar-translation method has been criticized for its restricted focus on practical communication skills and its reliance on memorization. Its usefulness in promoting fluency and communicative competence was often questioned. As language teaching methodologies have evolved, more learner-centered and communicative approaches have gained prominence.

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2.2 The Direct Method

The Direct Method (DM), also known as the Natural Method, is an instructional approach that stresses oral communication and the direct use of the target language inside the classroom walls. It aims to create a language-rich environment where students learn English by immersing themselves in authentic language experiences. In this method, the educator is perceived as a facilitator that encourages learners to communicate in English from the very beginning. The use of a native language is minimized, and students are encouraged to think and respond directly in English. Conferring to Franke's statements;

A language could best be taught by using it actively in the classroom. Rather than using analytical procedures that focus on explanation of grammar rules in classroom teaching, teachers must encourage direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language in the classroom.

(1884, 14-15)

Accordingly, classroom instruction involves the usage of visual aids, gestures, and real-life objects to convey meaning. Dialogues, role-plays, and interactive exercises are used to simulate real-life communication situations. Grammar and vocabulary are implicitly taught within the context of eloquent language use, rather than explicit rules and explanations.

One of the main principles of the DM is the avoidance of translation. Consecutively, the target language is taught and reinforced through constant exposure and expressive communication. It enables students develop a natural and intuitive understanding of the language without relying on the native language as a crutch. The essence is on refining oral proficiency and promoting natural language production. Conclusively, the direct method highlights the importance of authentic communication and provides a learner-centered approach to language teaching. It encourages active participation, builds confidence, and fosters a natural and intuitive understanding of the English language. However, it began to lose its popularity mainly for requiring native speakers as educators.

2.3 The Audiolingual Method

The decline of the Direct Method paved the way for the Audiolingual which

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underscores the use of audio and oral practice through extensive listening and speaking activities to develop learners' language skills. In this method, students engage in various drills, dialogues, and repetition exercises to reinforce correct pronunciation, intonation, and grammar patterns. By listening to and imitating native speakers, learners internalize the language naturally, similarly to children when acquiring their first language.

In addition, the audiolingual method places importance on pattern practice and memorization. Students learn language patterns and structures through repetition and are encouraged to respond automatically without little attention to grammar rules. Audio materials such as tapes, recordings, and language labs are commonly used in audiolingual classrooms to deliver authentic language input.

2.4 Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) revolutionized language teaching by standing on real-life communication where its attention is not solely on grammatical accuracy but also on the functional and communicative language aspects. Its prominence goes back to the 1960s, as thoroughly indicated by Howatt;

By the end of the sixties it was clear that the situational approach ... had run its course. There was no future in continuing to pursue the chimera of predicting language on basic of situational events. What was required was a closer study of the language itself and return to the traditional concept that utterances carried meaning in themselves and expressed the meaning and intentions of the speakers and writers who created them.

(1984: 280)

This approach identifies language as a social interactive tool that heightens learners' ability to effectively express themselves. Besides, the role of teachers in CLT is that of monitors that deliberately feature a learner-centered classroom practice to create a supportive environment for students who can naturally interact with one another (Harmer, 2001). Cooperation is highly advocated; learners are encouraged to assist each other during pair and group work while fostering a sense of teamwork and shared responsibility. Additionally, instructors provide feedback and guidance to support learners in improving their language proficiency and taking an active role in their language growth.

2.5 Competency Based Approach

The Competency-Based Approach (CBA) promotes a learner-centered setting and emphasizes the development of essential language competencies, such as fluency, accuracy, comprehension, and critical thinking. Learners are heartened to communicate their ideas clearly, express themselves appropriately in different social situations, understand, and interpret various forms of written and spoken English. Moreover, CBA recognizes the importance of individualized learning and tailored instruction to meet learners' specific needs and goals (Herb, 2023). Students develop a deeper understanding of the English language and its cultural nuances, empowering them to successfully navigate English-speaking environments and engage in meaningful cross-cultural communication (Harris, 2017).

Regarding the assessment chore, the principles underlying the CBA reflect a holistic and comprehensive approach to evaluating learners' capacities. Tabbe (2019) suggested multiple performance tasks to be utilized such as projects, portfolios, or presentations that enable learners showcase their language skills and apply what they have learned in practical ways. On the other hand, Larsen and Matthew (2015) pointed out the primary objectives to evaluate learners' competencies which go beyond simply testing theoretical knowledge namely; communicative abilities, task-based performance, functional language use, behaviourist progress, integrative, integrated and teamwork deftness.

Reviewing the aforementioned methods and approaches tiled a comprehensive overview of the English language teaching evolution. This exploration represents a foundation for the subsequent sections that tackle the effectiveness and implications of various teaching methods in middle schools.

3. Participants

Teaching English entails a mutual exchange between teachers and learners. Therefore, the subjects selected for this research were second-year EFL pupils from middle schools and Algerian educators. By including both apprentices and teachers as participants, the study ensures a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, contributing to a more comprehensive and insightful investigation of English language learning and teaching in Algeria's educational setting.

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3.1 Teachers

Involving Algerian instructors provides valuable acumens into the teaching practices, methodologies, and perspectives within the Algerian educational system. Breen and Candlin describe teachers' roles as follows;

The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; first, as an organizer of resources and as a source himself, second as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities .

(1980: 99)

Examining a sample of 16 teachers' experiences and perspectives uncovered valuable feedback about the English language teaching and learning landscape in Algeria. One of the key aspects of a constructive teaching method is creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Teachers strive to build positive relationships with their pupils, fostering trust, respect, and open communication by establishing a safe and welcoming space.

3.2 Pupils

A group of 60 pupils from second-year middle schools was selected using a simple random sampling, aged between 12 and 15 years old. This age cluster typically represents a cornerstone in their educational cursus which is known for significant cognitive and social changes. By studying this population, researchers can better understand the challenges they face while learning the English language.

During their first year of schooling, pupils are introduced to the English language for the very first time where they learn basic vocabulary, greetings, simple sentences, and common expressions. This marks the beginning of their formal English language learning journey. For many of them, this initial exposure

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is an exciting and novel experience. They encounter new sounds, words, and ways of communication that differ from their native language.

Throughout the second year, pupils engage in activities and exercises that expand their vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. They are promoted to express themselves with increasing complexity, using more diverse vocabulary and constructing more elaborate sentences. Teachers have a fundamental position in building a supportive and engaging context that sparks pupils' curiosity and interest for learning English.

4. Instruments and Procedures

Two questionnaires were administered to collect data from the investigated participants. Questionnaires are a broadly used method in academic researches, thoughtfully targeted to gather demographic data about the applicants, such as their age, gender, educational background, and any relevant factors that could fortify the study. This questionnaire showcased a comprehensive profile of the participants in order to cognize the educational framework and characteristics of the sample.

The questionnaires contained a series of carefully constructed questions related to the topic of investigation. These questions elicited participants' opinions, experiences, and the most deployed teaching methods. It included both closed-ended questions, which required participants to choose from predefined response options, and open-ended questions that needed more detailed and personalized responses.

5. Findings and Discussion

In light of teachers' outcomes, they have a wide range of experience in teaching English ranging from 5 to 23 years. They also expressed an unfeigned fondness for their profession and their passion for teaching English shines through, demonstrating their dedication and commitment to their pupils' education and language improvement. Teachers who enjoy their jobs often possess a genuine interest in their learners' progress and take pleasure in witnessing their growth.

Teachers employed various instructional strategies to accommodate the diverse learning styles and needs of their pupils. Visual aids, gestures, and real-life examples were also used to facilitate comprehension and make the learning process more accessible and relatable. Their prominent goal was to generate a positive and inclusive classroom environment that fosters a love for learning and a sense of accomplishment in pupils as they begin their English language venture.

Accordingly, a great proportion of instructors focused on building pupils' confidence and familiarity with the English language. They provided ample opportunities for practice, repetition, and reinforcement to assist pupils in evolving their language skills gradually. Furthermore, pupils were exhilarated to express themselves ingeniously through art, storytelling, or role-playing activities to enhance their language acquisition.

Concerning the relevance of a lesson plan, the majority of educators (74%) rated planning a lesson as being requisite (Figure 1). They further declared that without proper planning, a lesson runs the risk of becoming chaotic, leaving pupils feeling lost and unsure about what they are supposed to be doing and why. This lack of structure and clarity would hinder effective learning and disrupt class discipline.

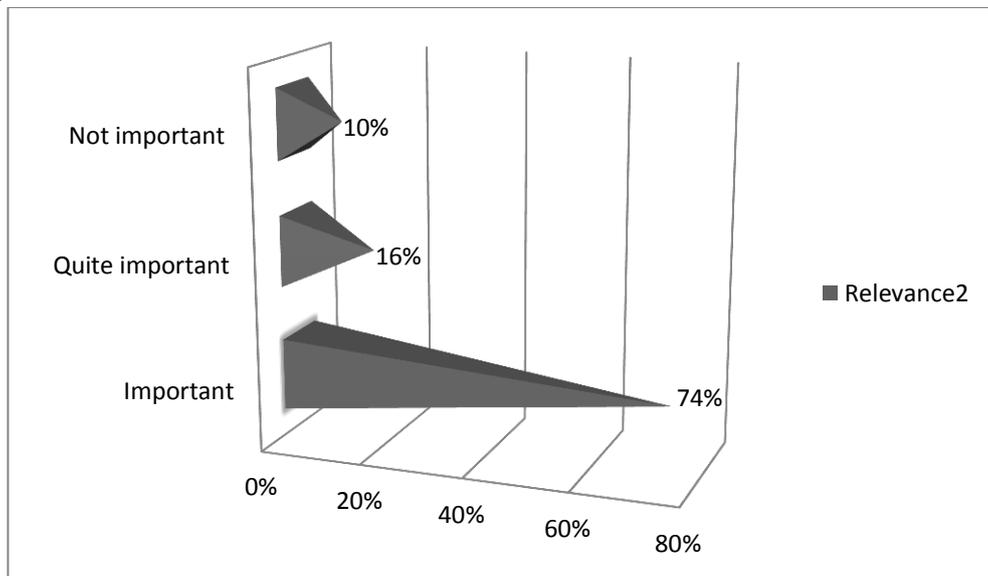


Figure 1: Lesson Plan Relevance

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When a lesson is well-planned, it dispenses a roadmap for both the teacher and the students. As ratified by Robertson and Acklam (2000: 03), “*If you imagine that a lesson is like a journey, then the lesson plan is the map. It shows where you start, where you finish and the route to take to get there*”. It services teachers set clear objectives, cover the necessary content, determine the sequence of activities, and establish a logical flow of instruction sorted with the allocated time and desired learners’ learning outcomes. Students benefit from this structure as it equips them with a sense of direction and purpose, enabling them to understand the relevance and importance of the tasks and undertakings they are engaged in.

Correspondingly, most teachers (92%) highlighted the paramount importance of designing a congruous syllabus. A scrupulously crafted curriculum acts as a bridge that connects the goals of the instructors with the aspirations and requirements they aim to impart to their learners. It mainly encompasses relevance, coherence, flexibility, clarity, engaging, interactive, appropriate assessment, and constructive feedback mechanisms.

In view of the dominant adopted teaching method, a large number of teachers (46%) embraced the competency-based approach during their English language classes (Figure 2). They declared that CBA optimizes pupils’ learning outcomes and aligns well with the English language education goals. By emphasizing practical skills, personalization, and active engagement, this approach equips learners with the necessary tools to become proficient and confident English language users.

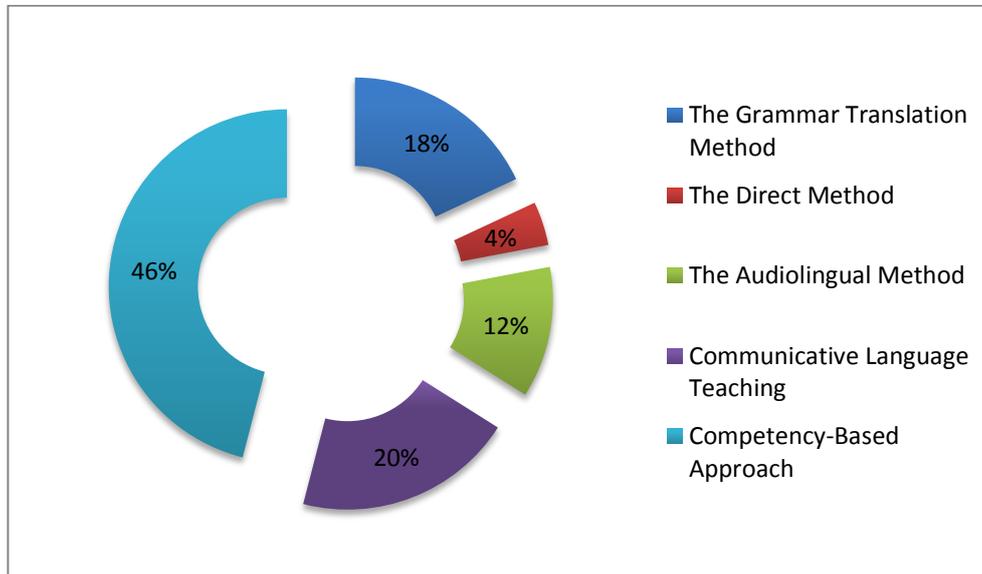


Figure 2: Teaching Methods Classification

Subsequently, teachers avowed that tailoring instruction to individual needs would unleash opportunities for customized learning, and foster a sense of ownership, and autonomy among pupils each one has unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

As to pupils' responses, the majority (76%) expressed a positive view towards learning English, considering it an interesting subject. Their motivation stems from a variety of reasons, including their aspirations to utilize the English language in their future endeavours and desire to broaden their knowledge and cultural prospect. Conversely, a smaller proportion expressed a lack of interest in learning English. Their reasons varied, declaring that grasping the grammar rules or vocabulary was quite challenging, whereas some had a stronger inclination towards subjects like science and mathematics. They might prioritize these topics over English due to their personal interests and career aspirations. While English may not resonate with their individual preferences, they recognize the importance of other subjects in shaping their academic paths.

An overwhelming majority of pupils, approximately 96%, displayed a strong motivation to learn English. Their motivation is fuelled by the desire to enhance their language skills and extend their horizons by being able to fluently communicate in English-speaking backgrounds. Furthermore, the majority

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actively participated in classroom interactions. They eagerly engage in discussions, group activities, and collaborative projects. These learners acknowledged the benefits of interacting with their peers and teachers since they have opportunities to practice their English, share ideas, and develop their speaking and listening skills. Meanwhile, some pupils exhibited a more reserved and shy demeanour. These learners require additional sustenance and assistance to feel comfortable participating in classroom interactions.

During the questionnaire, second-year pupils were asked about their views on teachers using Arabic during English lectures. The findings revealed that approximately 68% responded with "sometimes" as demonstrated in Figure 3. They admitted that there might be certain instances where the use of Arabic in moderation could be beneficial in clarifying complex concepts, explaining difficult grammar points, or providing additional support when necessary. They also recognized that occasional explanations or translations in Arabic could deepen their comprehension and sustain their overall learning experience.

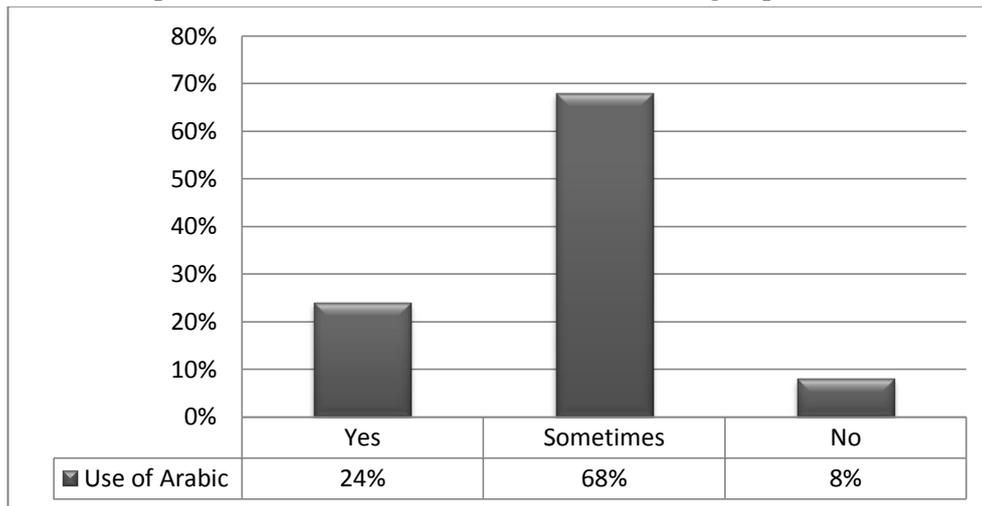


Figure 3: Use of Arabic in English Lectures

Contrariwise, 8% of learners expressed their disagreement concerning the use of their mother tongue. They firmly believed that resorting to Arabic would hinder their English language acquisition, yet advocated the use of synonyms, visual aids, or gestures as alternative methods for conveying meaning.

The final question of the two questionnaires was about the potential role of technology in endorsing learning English. The results revealed that a significant

majority, approximately 88% of respondents retorted with a resounding "beneficial" (Figure 4). They praised the value and benefits that technology can bring from easy access to a wealth of online resources, interactive language-learning platforms, and educational apps, to digital tools that can boost their English language learning. They appreciated the convenience and flexibility that technology offers, allowing both teachers and learners to practice English anytime and anywhere.

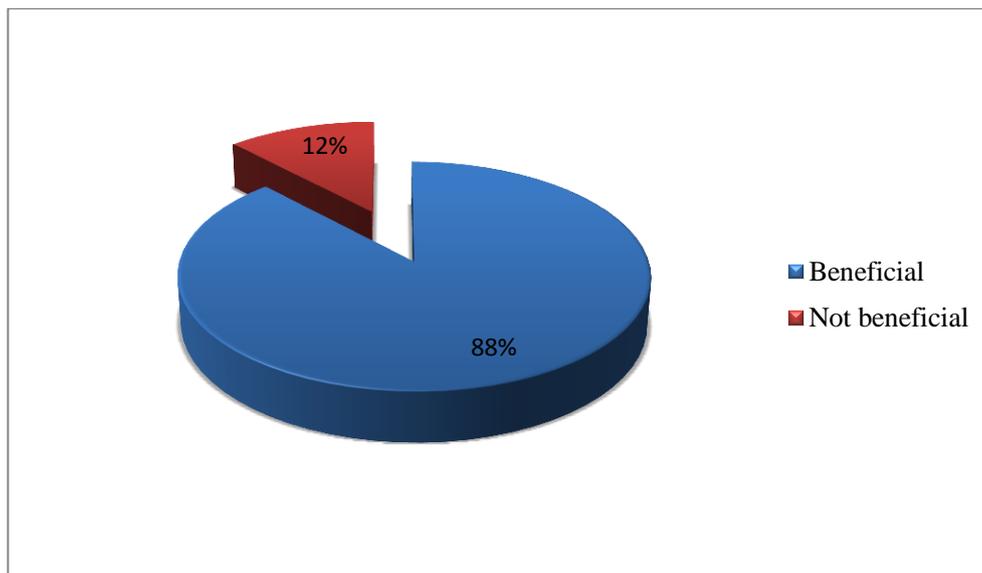


Figure 4: Technology Use

Utilizing language-learning applications, online platforms, multimedia resources, and digital collaboration tools, expedite self-paced learning, provide immediate feedback, and synthesize opportunities for authentic language use. By leveraging technology in a purposeful and well-designed manner, teachers can contrive engaging and interactive learning experiences that cater to learners' diverse prerequisites and learning styles.

6. Recommendations

There is no one-size-fits-all teaching method that could conclusively suit all types of learners in a definite classroom. The outlined recommendations for teachers forwarding learners consolidate the nuances of English acquisition within the context of real-life communication and their overall language proficiency. In

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order to labour EFL educators enrich their teaching practices and stay up-to-date with the evolving years and technology, the following suggestions were considered:

- *Professional Development Opportunities:* participate in professional development programs, workshops, and conferences. These events provide valuable acumens into the latest teaching methodologies, strategies, and technological advancements. By continuously expanding their knowledge and skills, teachers would adapt their teaching approaches to meet the changing needs of learners.
- *Stay Informed about Educational Research:* stay updated with the latest research and trends in education, particularly in the field of language teaching and technology integration. Encourage them to explore academic journals, educational blogs, and reputable online resources that offer insights into effective teaching strategies and the integration of technology into the classroom.
- *Engage in Continuous Reflection and Self-Assessment:* embolden teachers to regularly reflect on their teaching practices and assess their effectiveness. By critically evaluating their methods, strengths, and areas for improvement, teachers will identify opportunities to adapt and adopt new approaches aligned with current educational trends. Self-reflection could be supplemented by seeking feedback from colleagues, students, and administrators.

For the purpose of striking a balance, teachers are deemed to employ a variety of instructional strategies by considering learners' preferences and concerns. They might utilize contextualized examples, visual aids, gestures, and synonym explanations to support comprehension without overly relying on Arabic. By endorsing a primarily Anglophone setting while selectively incorporating Arabic when required, educators would ultimately sharpen a conducive learning atmosphere that maximizes language acquisition while providing necessary funding.

7. CONCLUSION

This research strived to provide valuable insights and recommendations addressing the aroused problem of improving the overall English language teaching quality. The derived findings delivered the potential to inform educators,

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curriculum developers, and policymakers in making informed decisions regarding syllabus design, lesson planning, and instructional strategies. By exploring these crucial aspects, it contributes to the advancement of English language education and enhances the learning experiences of both teachers and learners.

The present enquiry was built upon the hypothesis that employed teaching methodology generates favourable learning conditions. It is firmly alleged that the approaches embodied by EFL teachers have a significant impact on the acquisition of the English language by learners. It was also unveiled that instructors have an indispensable position in guiding and facilitating the language learning process. Their expertise, instructional techniques, and ability to create an appealing and supportive learning environment greatly influence the learners' progress and success in acquiring English.

By harnessing an eclectic teaching method, teachers will foster a more interactive, personalized, and vigorous learning setting that supports students' language acquisition and English proficiency. Conclusively, the inclusion of English in the Algerian curriculum and the dedicated efforts of teachers in classrooms contributed to promoting learners' linguistic abilities, their global communication, and expanded their perspectives in various academic and technological domains.

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