Application of Internet-Based Language Learning in Teaching English Classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi in Post-Pandemic Coronavirus

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Abstract–

This paper handles the application of Internet-Based Language Learning (IBLL) in teaching English classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi, Libya. Teaching English at Libyan universities in general is based on teacher-centered lecturing, in which students sit passively take whatever provided to them from their instructors. This traditional strategy of teaching had encountered challenges due to closure of the university because of the pandemic of Coronavirus by the beginning of 2020, which required shifting to virtual online teaching. The researcher of this paper has conducted this paper to investigate about this new experience of learning and teaching at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. The researcher uses qualitative research method, in which he uses literature review as secondary resources and interviewing a sample of students from Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi as primary resources. Findings of the study reveal that students and teacher encounter challenging in applying IBLL, the biggest challenges are represented in weakness of the Internet and black out of the power. The researcher presents recommendations based on the findings obtained.

Keywords–*integration, virtual world, Internet, technology, blended learning*

Introduction

Due to the pandemic of Coronavirus in the world, almost all economic and educational activities had been negatively affected, where organizations and institutions had been shut

down completely. Libya, of course, was not an exception from this critical situation and had been affected negatively by this abrupt action which had led to searching for potential remedies to cover up the closure of the academic institutions and the cease of study.

As other education ministries in the world, the Libyan Ministry of Education found itself in a position to find out a way to compensate the loss and ceasing of study that bases mainly on face-to-face lecturing. As we are living in the era of globalization, in which the Internet dominates in almost all facets of life, the Libyan Ministry of Education has implied on academic institutions to think of the Internet in education as the most prominent remedy for encountering the pandemic of Coronavirus and keeping the study in progress.

As this experience is new in the Libyan educational system, instructors, students, and administration have encountered several challenges. Yet, Coronavirus directs attention to important facilities used in teaching and learning that had been ignored completely or partially in the Libyan settings before the pandemic of this virus. Such facilities include technology and the use of the Internet as core tools in teaching and learning. Hence, this paper is directed to investigate about the application of IBLL in teaching English classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi in post-pandemic Coronavirus from students' perspectives, focusing mainly on the challenges students encounter, potential remedies, pros, cons, and the like.

Literature Review

In this part, the researcher is presenting the literature review that covers the theme of this study.

Integration of Technology in Education

People in this globalized world tend to use technology to go side by side with the changes in life, so educational online programs provide students with new skills to use technology and be part of this digital society. Integrating with technology and the Internet, in fact, prepare students for the future that depends mainly on technology in education (Prensky, 2001).

Technology, based on Chapelle (2003), "adds new and interesting dimensions to the tasks developed through the Internet and can therefore change critical dimensions of the task situation" (p. 23). Hence, integration technology in education is core and an integral part in the education process. Integration technology in education, in fact, is not new as it started decades ago in developed countries, where technology has always proven success and advancement in the field of education in general and language learning and language teaching in particular.

Ihnesh (2020) emphasizes the importance of integrating methods of teaching English with technology as technology can be a useful aid for teachers to enhance the process of learning. Hence, it is important that teachers "exploit these technological aids to the full to harness them for the purpose of more successful learning" (p. 23). Fadhil and Hamed (2020) agree with Ihnesh in integrating methods of teaching with technology for improving language skills, namely reading. This integration affects positively on the language skills development, namely "phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction, reading fluency, and text comprehension … These technologies bring excitement into the classroom and enable students to learn successfully" (p. 117). Shyamlee (2012) confirms that when the teacher's guidance leads students' thought styles and motivation, "technology seeks integration of teaching and learning and provides the students greater incentives" (p. 152).

Yet, using technology in some developing countries, including Libya, was not that easy due to various physical and nonphysical conditions. Several studies and research in the Libyan context reveal that the unavailability of technological devices represents one of the biggest physical challenges encountered in the process of integration of technology and the Internet in education, and the resistance of teachers or students to shift from the traditional strategy that is based on lecturing into a strategy that bases on technology and the Internet represents one of the biggest nonphysical challenges encountered. Some of other challenges include "teacher's and students' skills in using technology, availability of technological devices, and the family's understanding of the benefits of technology in learning" (Omar, 2014, p. 58).

Like it or not, integrating technology and the Internet in education has become an obligation in the era of globalization, which "shifts the world to a global village, if not a global tent. People, in this global village, communicate with each other easily and effectively" (Omar, 2019, p. 512). In addition to globalization, the world has been invaded by a fatal virus, called

Coronavirus or COVID 19 that makes in some conditions traditional strategies of teaching and learning impossible and dangerous on teachers' and students' lives alike.

Virtual Worlds

We are living in the globalized world, which has become dominated largely by the Internet. It has become a matter of fact that the Internet shifts the world into a digital world or virtual world. The Internet has actually invaded almost all facets of life, including economic and educational sectors. In this vein, Abdulkader (2020) said, "It is a matter of fact that people in the 21st century live in an era of technology almost dominated by the Internet. Media have become indispensable in our life in this era in a way that they become an integral part of our culture" (p. 181).

As the world has become 24/7 digital, the Internet has dominated all facets of life, and we should benefit from it in education. The Internet, in fact, "is used nowadays to shrink the gaps between school and reality" (Omar, 2018, p.189). It has made a revolution in education, namely after the pandemic of Coronavirus in the world by the end of 2019. The use of the virtual online educational programs has become a faith that no educational institution can deny or reject.

Technology, based on Dalgarno and Lee (2010), plays a vital role not only in people's private lives, but also in their career areas, including education. Teachers and students in the area of globalization are using the Internet in learning and teaching. So, many public and private educational institutions credit virtual worlds as main parts in their educational system.

The virtual world, according to Bell (2008), is "a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers" (p. 2). Schroeder (2008) defines virtual world as "persistent virtual environments in which people experience others as being there with them - and where they can interact with them" (p. 2). Harper, Hedber and Wright (2000) emphasize the importance of virtual worlds in learning and teaching language as they generate authentic contexts to students that would be impossible otherwise. Virtual worlds provide opportunities to students to investigate, collaborate, and involve in an educational setting of their own selection and willingness. Vickers (2010) defines virtual worlds as

> immersive and social environments where learners can visit relevant locations online and meet with others for real-time (voice or text) conversations. Virtual worlds, therefore, add a very different quality to online research; whereas the 2D web is rich in (text, audio, image and video-based) content, the 3D web adds a sense of location and realtime social interaction. (p. 75)

Virtual worlds, based on Can (2009), help students build their own language knowledge and alter the form of their avatar and the setting around them to practice the language socially in communicative situations. Virtual worlds, hence, "could benefit students with enriched resources and possibilities for language use, construction and practice" (p. 69). Accordingly, Collentine (2011) sees that virtual worlds can "be applied to task based language learning with the focus on the use of authentic language and on encouraging students to make choices about the target language input they process" (p. 52).

Virtual worlds provide students with opportunities to create authentic situations in the real world with new experiences to help them accommodate and integrate with a new world. Students, accordingly, become able to understand new concepts and knowledge and perform specific learning tasks in a safe setting (Chittaro and Ranon, 2007). Such virtual worlds help students "engage in a series of purposeful educational inquiries without losing interest or sidestepping intended learning goals" (Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008, p. 547).

Accordingly, Kruk (2014) believes that online virtual worlds are crucial tools in the field of foreign or second language learning as they enhance students' process of learning through motivating them to be part of the education system. Moreover, virtual worlds provide students with "the opportunity to take part in virtual language courses or lessons as well as visit places connected with the target language culture" (p. 52).

Internet-Based Language Learning (IBLL)

Several studies and research in the field of learning and teaching English in Libya reveal that traditional methods of teaching had been used in higher education in Libya. Omar (2019), for instance, highlights that "though several methods of teaching English used in Libyan schools, the most dominant one is GTM, in which teachers focus on teaching grammar out of context and translation from English into Arabic (p. 520).

Omar and Altaieb (2015) believe that there are various challenging in learning and teaching English in Libya due to the traditional methods of teaching used. They confirm that such challenges are not "related to English as a language, but the problem is in the methods of teaching and learning English in schools and English language institutes. The process of learning and teaching English in schools and English language institutes entails knowing about English, not knowing how to use English in authentic situations" (p. 743).

For such challenges and others, namely the pandemic of Coronavirus, the Ministry of Education had thought of the Internet as a resort to solve such challenges and improve the situation of learning and teaching English in Libya. When we think of learning and teaching English and the Internet, Internet-Based Language Learning (IBLL) Method seems the most suitable method to be used in such a context. IBLL, based on Agarwal (2010), "provides new possibilities for assisting teachers to successfully meet this challenge" (p. 3).

Shifting from traditional lecturing into using technological devices started gradually from simple tools as audio tapes and videos to modern tools as computers and the Internet. In either of these tools challenges and rejection were encountered, but they gained acceptance and approval later with their cons and pros. For instance, shifting to virtual online education shifts the traditional strategy of teaching from teacher-centered lecturing into either online basis education or blended education, in which traditional education is mixed with online education. Such a shift creates a learning environment, where students can comfortably post at any time, in any place, in an equitable way, and in extensive discussion boards, which "allow students to thoroughly think of the posts as well, occasionally causing a lively debate (Enbaya and Nasir, 2019 p. 7).

Yet, we need to consider the fact that a specific strategy or method might function effectively in one situation under specific conditions but not in another. Though IBLL confirms successful and effective in some settings, it confirms unsuccessful and ineffective in others. In some setting, several challenges and barriers encounter the application of IBLL. Agarwal (2010) presents some of these challenges as the follows:

- Some of the students and teachers are unfamiliar with the use of computer and the Internet.

- Sometimes the online resources are difficult to access and use due to difficulty of using or unavailability of online resources.
- Some online resources are limited due to the specific requirements required in computers such as memory, speed, ram capacity, and the like.
- Some of the online resources need much time for processing the information required.
- Some teachers and students have less ability for typing and using the computer facilities to cope with online resources.
- Some of the Internet websites need subscriptions and specific computer programs to access.
- Some students and teachers find difficulty to access to some online resources because of the barriers in language or misinterpretation of the instruction.
- Some of the computers may function based on their designs that do not cope with IBBL.
- Some teachers and students sometimes fail to pay money for paid programs, online resources, or equipment required to join or access educational groups.
- Some students and teachers might encounter technical problems that lead to computers' malfunctions or breaking down.

Of course, online technology is affected mainly by various factors, including teachers' and students' awareness of technological literacy, teachers' assistance and understanding, students' motivation and interaction, and many others. In this vein, Abdulkader (2020) confirms that online technology assists students "to open up interactions with other learners and users of the target language in addition to interactions with their teachers that could be difficult to achieve in the classroom" (pp. 175-176).

In his study, Abdulkader (2020) concludes that in addition to challenges attributed to unavailability and subscription access to technology, teachers' resistance to shift from the traditional strategies of teaching into using technology in teaching is one of the biggest challenges, as reported by 64% of the participants of his study. Some other participants, 64%, see students' technological literacy is the biggest challenging students encounter in using online learning. Another 61% of the participants see that the biggest challenge is represented in teachers' technological literacy. Whereas, some participants see that the biggest challenging

teachers encounter is representing in using online technology in teaching "Examples of logistic issues are access, updates, and other technical issues" (p. 182).

Another study conducted by Azzouz and Ben Taleb (2020) shows that Libyan students encounter various challenges in using online resources in learning, where 85% of the participants of their study have had no access to technological devices to submit their lessons or benefit from the lessons provided. Some of these challenges include "lack of technological tools and services such as computers, head projectors, digital video disks (DVDs), smart boards, and the whole range of modern devices that are used in modern language teaching" (p. 207). Other study conducted by (Omar, 2014) shows that 88% of the participants suffer from lack of technological devices and equipment. Neal (2011) attributes challenges to "our lack of expertise and confidence in these new technologies that prevents us from allowing our students to explore new media literacy possibilities in their composing processes" (p. 126).

Conclusion

Thanks to advancements in technology and the Internet, the world has been changing dramatically, which required us to change accordingly. The education strategies and methods used decades ago, for instance, have been changing due to changes in the technological advancements and the conditions accompanying. So, the blackboard and chalk changed into whiteboard and marker or smart board in most developed countries. Also, the traditional strategy of teaching that is based on classical lecturing and face-to-face interaction in the classroom has recently changed into virtual online teaching and learning basing mainly on technological devices and the Internet.

Though virtual online teaching and learning has become a must in the conditions we are living nowadays, there are various challenges have been encountered. Some of these challenges are attributed to physical conditions as the unavailability of computers, weakness or unavailability of the Internet access, and the like. Some of these challenges are attributed to teachers' and students' resistance to shift from traditional lecturing into virtual online learning, teachers' and students' unawareness of technological literacy, and the like. Yet, it is an obligation to shift to virtual online learning, based on IBLL methods of teaching to keep the progress of learning on.

Methodology of the Study

This part of the study is dedicated mainly to the methodology used to fulfill this study, followed by data analysis, findings, and recommendations.

Methodology of the Study

To fulfill this study, the researcher followed qualitative research method, in which he based on literature review as secondary resources, and interviewing a sample of students from various semesters and various departments at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi.

Scope and Limits of the Study

This study is directed to investigate about the application of IBLL at the Faculty of Languages, so the scope of this study is directed to investigating about the application of the IBLL at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi in a specific period of time between October 2020 and January 2021, which is the period of time covered by Coronavirus pandemic.

Problem of the Study

As other education systems in the world, Libyan education system had been affected negatively by the pandemic of Coronavirus that spread worldwide by the end of 2019. This unexpected action had led to closure of almost all facets of life, including schools and universities. To keep study on and to compensate for the closure of universities, the Libyan Ministry of Education resorted to both virtual online teaching and learning and blending learning, in which face-to-face lecturing is mixed with online teaching.

In either remedy, online teaching or learning is involved, which has caused problems to all parties of education system: students, instructors, and administration. Several studies and research in the area of English language learning and teaching reveal the fact that technological devices are hardly used in Libyan education system due to physical and nonphysical conditions. Hence, the researcher sees that there is a problem needed to be investigated to find remedies and present recommendations.

Questions of the Study

To fulfill this study, reach findings, and present recommendations, the researcher has set a main question to this study as:

What challenges students encounter in learning virtual online classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi?

To answer this question and present findings, the researcher has set up some other sub-questions as:

How is IBLL applied in learning English classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi?

What are pros and cons of IBLL in Libyan education system?

What do Libyan students think of application of IBLL in learning online virtual classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi?

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consists of 15 students from various semesters and departments at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. The participants had already taken online virtual English classes at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. The participants were selected randomly and were willing to participate in this study voluntarily.

Importance of the Study

This study aims at identifying the scope and limits of applying IBLL on teaching online virtual classes at Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. Hence, the importance of this study lies in directing the attention to the crucial need of using technology and the Internet in education system in Libya, namely in higher levels. The importance of this study lies in encouraging and motivating other researchers to write and investigate further information and facts on the theme of the study.

Data Collection

The data of this study were collected mainly through two resources: secondary through literature review relevant to the topic of the study and primary through interviewing a sample of the participants. The sample includes 15 voluntarily students from Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. The data of the primary resources were gathered through face-to-face interviews with the participants in the researcher's office at the university.

The researcher prepared various questions that might serve the objectives to be answered by the participants of the study (See the questions in the appendix attached). The students' names were pseudo and replaced by other names for privacy and confidentiality. Also, the interviews have been used only for the purpose of this study and will never be revealed or used for other purposes. The researcher used a digital camera for recording without showing the participants' faces or names.

Data Analysis

After collected the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews based on the questions' order for the sake of analyzing them to reach findings.

- The data analysis of the participants' answers to the question "What do you think of online classes?" shows that the 75% (10 participants) do not like or at least not fully satisfied with online classes they had already had. For instance, Sara said "I didn't benefit from classes", and Hana said, "I didn't depend on them. In fact, I didn't watch them at all. I depend on other things and sheet, you know". Faraj explained "You know the light and Internet, so it is useless". In contrast, Samira believes that we have to go to online classes because of the virus. Ahmad, also, confirms the need for online classes even where there is problem.
- The participants of the study confirm that the classes were recorded on slides with explanations and shared on Telegram. So, Telegram was the only media used by the Faculty of Languages at the University of Benghazi. Some participants (60%), 12 participants, watch Libya Channel TV, where some classes were broadcast. Four participants (26%) used other media not recognized by the Faculty of Languages, such as YouTube and Facebook to get information and knowledge about the classes they had registered in. Two participants contacted with their teacher through Facebook Group.

Three participants made WhatsApp group with other students in the class to share ideas. Three participants engaged in Google Classroom with their teacher and students of the class.

- The data analysis of the participants' answer to the question "What do you think of these media?" shows partial satisfaction with the media used by the Faculty of Languages. While six participants express their satisfaction with Telegram, the other nine participants express their dissatisfaction. For instance, Intesar said, "I don't watch the PowerPoint because I don't understand the language. The voice is not clear. I stop watching and go to sheet". Ali, also, said "No interaction. I need to interact with the teacher." Salma said, "waste of time. I don't see it".
- The participants of the study present various challenges in using online classes, but they agree in two main challenges: the Internet and electricity. Sami, for instance, said, "The Internet is weak, so I always lose signals and get interrupted. Also, the power goes out continuously". Noura said, "The Internet and power were the most challenges I encounter. Horrible!" Other challenges were physical such as unavailability of computers and lack of training to use Telegram.
- To find remedies for such challenges, some of the participants resort to other technological channels as YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Facebook Group and make groups of chatting to discuss on their classes. Others depend mainly on sheet and discussion with others in classes or joining to private lessons. Naima, for instance said, "I joined to a group of my friends and take private lessons. I don't understand". Samir said, "We make group discussion with my friends". Ten of the participants (75%) joined face-to-face classes the faculty conducted for two weeks, and they mentioned that they benefited from these classes. Asma said, "I depended only on the classes I attended at the university".
- The participants suggest that the faculty use blended learning, mixing online classes with traditional face-to-face classes. Also, they suggest that the faculty use other online educational programs as Zoom or Google Classroom. They also require the faculty to conduct a workshop or seminar on using online educational programs. They participants go with online learning but with conditions. For instance, Asma said, "I go with online

learning is important, but it should be in good way". Salem said, "Online learning is good but not here".

Findings

Based on the data analysis, the researcher reaches the following findings:

- Access to the Internet and continuous black out of electricity represent the biggest challenges students encounter in online learning.
- Most students and teachers lack technological literacy which affects negatively on both teaching and learning English classes at university.
- Using free of charge online educational programs does not provide enough space or time for both students and teachers to interact effectively on time to each other.
- Economic issues represented in some students' lack of computers and the need for modern computers that can be compatible with modern online educational programs represent a challenge, too.
- There is a rejection from some students and teachers to move from the traditional lecturing into online virtual learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, the researcher presents some of the recommendations as:

- It is core that teachers and students be given intensive training course on how to use technology in general and deal with online educational programs in particular. This conformed by Attelisi (2020), who states that "the need to learn how to use new technology in teaching is considered important for the teacher" (p. 186).
- It has become a must to be part of this globalized world through using the Internet in all facets of life in Libya, including education. The internet, based on Cong-Lem (2018) "has become an integral part of our daily life. In language education, it provides unparalleled linguistic input resources that can be utilized in teaching and learning a foreign language" (p. 144).

- It is essential that the Libyan Ministry of Education provide technological devices at universities to be used in the education system by teachers and students. Technology, based on Omar (2014) has become "a key of success in learning and teaching language, and language is a best means of technological advancement" (p. 60).
- It is important that both teachers and students be aware of technology literacy and include media literacy in teaching and learning English at university level. Media literacy, according to Haertel (Cited in Omar, 2018, p. 189) "can support ways of learning that would otherwise be difficult to achieve".

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