How to Use ICT to Improve the Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language in Secondary Schools in Benin

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1．Introduction

For a sustainable development, the children（boys and girls）of a nation need to get educated mainly in school context. To be well educated, there is need for a good education system. In this perspective, drawing the developmental objectives of Benin, the new education sector authorities highlighted the government's vision "Benin Alafia 2025" that: "In 2030, Benin education system ensures that all learners have access to the skill's, entrepreneurship spirit and innovation that will make them full-blown, fulfilled, competent and competitive citizens able to ensure economic growth, sustainable development and national cohesion".

As a matter of fact, this vision shows that there is need to improve the existing education system so that such great dreams can become true, starting from the current system as it is in 2019. Among others, there is need to work on both teachers and students, and to work on the physical and technological infrastructure. The students need to be equipped with the 21st century tools known as Information and Communication Technology to develop critical, creative and innovative abilities for them to be as competitive as expected. Instructors, which teachers are, also need to be trained as far as the use of these tools are concerned.

This article is about "How we can use ICT to improve the teaching and learning of English as a second language".

Many advanced nations such as Singapore and Japan have had such dreams in the past and of course handled it well. Even though the Beninese government has gradually started to open some ICT classrooms in some selected schools, we still need to learn from the countries which have already succeeded in this field. For example, in order to meet such goals, the Singaporean Ministry of Education（2009, 2010）had developed and implemented four different masterplans in their education system. The Ministry of Education also created a set of baseline ICT standards for students, mainly on such key subjects as English. Of my little experience I gathered during my stay in Japan, I noticed the presence of many ICT tools in the classroom, tools that facilitate the teaching and learning in general.

Which are these 21st century tools that really facilitate the teaching and learning of a language nowadays? How are they going to impact the teaching and learning of English mainly? How to handle their usage in order not to create another societal issue? Of course this research is going to provide answers to many other questions but the ones mentioned are the main ones.

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２．Problem statement and objectives

Being a francophone country, it is very common to find a Beninese secondary school student unable to neither speak English nor manipulate a computer device at the end of his or her seven years of learning English as a second language. Every year, there are many students, who think of English just as a subject in which they only need to score good grades in order to reach the upper classes. They don't see it as a language which needs to be spoken after all.

As mentioned earlier, in the Beninese developmental objectives, it is clearly stated that we want competent and competitive students. But the question is how can they be internationally as competitive and competent if they cannot speak English fluently nor master ICT tools? So I think it is better to increase the chances of our students we are going to put on the international scene in the future by providing them with the necessary tools so as to prevent them from being less competitive. The Beninese government has understood this fact and one of the measures they took is to allow English being taught from primary schools, which was not the case in the past. The other meaningful expected measure is the one this research is focused on: to allow the students to have early contact with ICT especially through the teaching and learning of English as a second language. How can a student who is not proficient in using ICT show to be as competitive as his or her competitors from other countries? This question is mainly the one that guided the reason of this research.

Of course, the target of this research is to:
- collect teachers' present viewpoints of the way English is taught now;
- collect teachers' needs and suggestions in order to cope with the new reforms especially as far as the introduction of ICT in the teaching and learning of English as as second language is concerned;
- help the government by making the results of the findings widely available.

3. Research methods and procedures

Although in Benin I am a high school teacher, during my stay in Japan I am considered to be a teacher training student, and as such I was fully considered as a student. This gave me the opportunity to be both subject and observer. It permitted me to receive as a student, and analyse what I received as a teacher. During my numerous class observations, I also had the chance to see teachers giving instructions and having the return from their students, as the reaction of a trainee. Being under a training course, my observations and remarks while a student were transformed to issues of discussions either between teacher training student colleagues or directly with the teacher whose class I visited. As a teaching class observant, I was given a questionnaire of how satisfactory the lesson was at the end of every class.

More so, I also gathered some keynotes from the Japanese classrooms I attended. The Japanese teachers used the existing ICT tools in the classrooms to implement their teaching. So, as a knowledgeable person, I observed their skills, methods, procedures and strategies with much care and attention.

So basically, the methods and procedures I used through this report are a kind of constructive criticism of my own observations in order to build up a new and meaningful way of touching the good side of my students while teaching them through the use of ICT.

Moreover, the answers I got from the teachers from Benin also contributed to the enrichment of this procedure.

4. Findings and Analysis

Based on the findings of some researchers, it is clearly proved that the quality of the English textbooks in use in Benin nowadays is not convincing and the system needs to be technology oriented, too. Although the topics in those textbooks are very relevant, contrary to the findings of a research about the topics of the textbooks in use in Japan. According to my former research *The Go for English and the English students book of 3è: traditional or communicative textbooks and which implications for the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Benin*（Aboki, 2015）, among the 55 students considered, 50 confirmed that their learning ability requires visual aid. This showed that the students are already in advance on the system, considering the analogy or the numeric aspects of it. The students are looking for things to be more interesting, thus the ultimate need of implementing things through the use of ICT.

More so, in this same former research work, it was also proved that the textbooks mostly covered writing and reading activities. Meanwhile, a textbook should rather be speaking and listening oriented in order to give more opportunities to the students for the speaking abilities to be developed.

In a comparative mind, I read some articles about Japan. A researcher carried out a study on the following theme: "What's wrong with English education in Japan?" and started that: "English education in Japan is not working. The percentage of students who emerge with actual English abilities are surprisingly low". According to the findings, "first, English education in Japan is lacking behind because it is taught for the tests not for speaking purposes. Second, the quality of the textbooks is low due to the covered grammar points and the topics which are not vivid but boring. Third, of all the hours of English education, how many of these hours were spent actually listening to and speaking English when we know that repeating is not the same as speaking".
（Source: Miller, 2014, para. 1, 2, 3）

In the same sense, when the French Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem was asked if French students are doing better in English, she declared that "Pupils are bored and that education officials needed to reawaken their appetite". She continued saying that "learning should be more fun and less stressful especially for High school students". It obviously means that the education system should consider and develop the need of the students.
（Source: Wikipedia, French school reforms: Lunches to languages）.

Furthermore, most of the students also commented on the length of a class which is two hours in junior high schools and three hours in senior high schools. The experience in Japan is that classes are maximum of ninety minutes.

Typically to this research, in all and every Japanese classes which I either attended as a student or I watched the development of a lesson as a teacher training student, I noticed the presence of the following tools which I call ICT tools. There are: steady electricity, projector, DVD player, tape recorder, electronic dictionary, laboratories, photocopy machines, and controlled internet sites accessible to students. It is also necessary to mention that students have their phones with them, but they are not used during class sections. In Japan, students spend their six years of primary education mostly about social studies and conscience awareness. So, this prepares the ground for them to behave accordingly. The size of the classes, 30 students at most, also prepares the basic for this practice.

In order to frame my work, a small set of questionnaire was drawn and addressed mainly to teachers through an online group, BNTEA (Benin Nation Teachers of English Association). Answers to this questionnaire are going to be presented in this section. I did not think of a questionnaire towards the students as I don't have the possibility to reach out to Beninese students.

Most of the teachers that kindly provided me with their answers are qualified ones and I am happy of that. This means that they are really able to appreciate the meaning of the research work.

As a matter of fact, most of my respondents agreed to have tried in one way or another to teach students using a visual aids, for example making the students listen to a text through a tape recorder or making them view a set of pictures through a projector. According to 84% of them, the reaction of the students was very well appreciated because they reacted in a way that was never noticed before. This reaction of course, made them multiply the usage of such tools in their classes, and thus they realized the urgent need of modernizing the teaching and learning style in order to suit and meet the students' expectations.

In the list of my respondents, of course there were some teachers who never had the opportunity to let their teaching go through an ICT. They argued that they did not have those tools and went forward requesting that it is the responsibility of the government to provide those tools. According to them, they really want to teach using those tools because they realized how interested the students are in those tools. Many advantages can be drawn from the use of those tools. Time saving, more active participation from the students, good assimilation of the lessons, are among others advantages I recorded. In out of class considerations, it is obvious that it would prepare them for a good life experience, the key for a successful nation.

From the result I got through my presentation at the International Conference on Multimedia Technology, ICMT 2019 on "Educational System in Benin, Need of Boosting the Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language through the Use of ICT" in Japan, I found out that it is necessary to implement the teaching and learning of English as a second language through the use of the devices that interest most of the students.

As far as the overlapping on unnecessary things while teaching is on, it is better to arouse the students' awareness on the issue rather than ignoring or running away from it. It is better

to handle it and discuss it in public with them since we know they practise bad behavior in private as teenagers always do. Doing it this way can also be a solution to a societal problem.

5．Recommendations

The main subjects which students represent here need to be shown the good awareness of the use of ICT so that they stick to its positive usages only. Not only will this new practice improve and ameliorate their performances in English but their contact with these ICT tools will open new innovative thinking in them. Parents also need to have a very mindful attention on the education of their children. So, it is better to invest in students while they are still little kids than wait for them to grow up before running in all directions for a better life. Education should be planned and well managed.

In order to be able to positively impact the life of the numerous students that a teacher is in charge of, it is an ultimate need for teachers to be well trained regarding the usage of these tools. Of course, it is already an opportunity that there is an association of Beninese teachers of English called BNTEA. Through this association online workshops are organized. It needs to be more active in order to provide teachers with ICT teaching resources and materials. For this task, the association needs the support of the education system authorities.

As far as the use of ICT in the education system is concerned, the authorities need to entice school actors, teachers and students by providing the minimum. In this list, we can mention well furnished laboratories. In these laboratories, there should be a very high quality internet connection, sets of projectors, computers, tape recorders, radio tapes, educational games and interactive digital media tools. On behalf of the teachers, it will be required from the teaching inspectors and advisers to plan seminars, workshops and training on:

・how to use these ICT tools;

・the different advantages of this new practice;

・the expectations and objectives of the implementation of especially English through the use of ICT.

It is now known that the government of Benin has launched the ICT classes in some selected schools. So, I am pleased to present the content of such classes. In fact, it is a classroom that consists of:

・a router,

・10 sockets,

・a wardrobe,

・41 computers,

・one projector,

・1 laboratory kit,

・2 air conditioning units,

・one interactive board,

・1 mini central photo voltaic,

・some digital educational contents,

· a software for classroom management.

Throughout the country, there are almost 1000 secondary schools and up to 9000 primary schools. In the whole 12 states of the country, the project has so far only equipped such ICT classes in 12 selected schools: 6 primary schools and 6 secondary schools. As a matter of fact, it is already a great pleasure that I was selected by the Japanese government through a MEXT scholarship to conduct such a research in this environment, and it will be very remarkable to continue what has been started. It is then my humble way of inviting and asking for the help from the Japanese government in the support of such project by providing the educational system of Benin with such ICT classes. It will mean nothing but enhance the quality of the existing relations between the two countries, fruits of the reason of my awarded scholarship.

NB : It was a very big pleasure for me to hear from a news report that the government of my country launched the operation of some ICT classrooms in some 24 selected schools.

6. Conclusion

The future of any nation relies on the quality of the human resources it has. Talking of the human resources, it directly implies and concerns the quality of the educational system, thus it is better to plan it consequently in order to expect good results. The current government of Benin realizes this fact and is tightly working to solve this handicap we are now facing. Besides their awareness, I think it is also interesting to draw the attention of the authorities to some practices which might contribute to the objective meeting, henceforth the importance of such research even though it has started little by little.

Implementing English language as a subject in Beninese schools through the use of ICT tools will have a lot of advantages for all the actors of the sector. Mainly for students, it will develop much curiosity such as critical thinking, innovations, online communication, computer skills, and many others. Although it is a nice way of reaching out to them and drawing the best from them but at the same time, there should be a control over the usage of these tools to prevent them from making or having a negative impact from their usage.

From the Japanese experience I had and based on the quality of the impact of early social studies on the Japanese students and its positive impacts on the society, I think we can also implement such things in our curriculum. It is never a shame to notice good things in one's neighbor's house and implement it in one's own house. But before then, we may conduct constant dialogue and guidance to arouse the consciousness of all the actors and this call for a new school understanding or orientation whereby both school authorities, teachers, students and of course parents should work tightly to make school a real awareness place.

Every nice idea to be implemented needs to be well planned, structured and financed. Moreover it is wonderful to find the different advantages in the usage of ICT in the Beninese educational system but it will be nicer to have an idea of what it implies in terms of facilities, infrastructures and cost. Where there is a will there is a way. The will and the way have both met and need to be spread through the schools of the 12 states of Benin for the happiness of all.

7．Acknowledgments

8．References

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Questionnaire

In order to help the achievement of this research work on *How can we use ICT to improve the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Benin secondary schools,* kindly provide your answer to these questions by choosing from the suggested ones or write your mind where necessary. Thank you for your collaboration.

NB : Your identification is not necessary and will not be let known.

1 - What is your qualification?

     a - Licence,   b - Maitrise,   c - Bapes,   d - Capes

2 - Do you notice any difference the way you were taught and the way you are teaching now?

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3 - Are you satisfied of the Education System the way it is now?

     a - Yes   b - No

4 - If not, what do you expect?

     a - Modernize the teaching system

     b - Go back to the traditional way of teaching

     c - Build a lot of classes

     d - Provide schools with laboratories

5 - Have you ever tried to have an audio visual class teaching with your students?

      a - Yes   b- No

6 - If yes, what was their reaction compared to the often used style?

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7 - If not, do you want to try?

      a - Yes   b - No

8 - What can you of it, expectations?

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9 - At this 21st century, is it necessary to adapt ICT to teaching and learning or integrate ICT as a pedagogical tool in the classroom?

      a - Yes   b - No