Toward technology integration: the case of foreign literature teachers in the Algerian University

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The teaching of foreign literatures in Algerian universities seem to fail drastically day after day as our departments are not endowed with the suitable software and hardware able to stimulate learners re-appreciate the world of literature. In addition, our support of reader-oriented theory, which has proved to be impossible to be implemented in traditional settings, has nurtured our inquiry concerning the urge to install a likely different teaching environment amenable to empower students with testable evidence to the literary theoretical background they have received. Therefore, the present study raises three questions: is any research being conducted to define the incorporation of the internet in the teaching of literature in Algerian universities, what could be the impact of this technological revolution on a better delivery of a foreign literature at the higher educational level, and would the use of electronic sources improve the dramatic decline of literature teaching in our universities? The investigation's findings revealed, in fact, that the potential of the internet and the wide scope of possibilities it may offer is incomparable, yet, they also revealed that an interesting number of teachers do not use the internet as a pedagogical support and if ever they do, they do not proceed to any change in their traditional approach to teaching. Thus, the recommendation from this study is to develop a well structured theoretical frame able first: to make university teachers technologically literate, and second to enhance a more beneficial result in teaching foreign literatures in an Algerian context while using the internet.

Keywords: EFL literature- technological literacy

1-Introduction

Although research in the field of computer-assisted language learning(CALL) has certainly developed for the last two decades (Shaw, 1998, Kang-Mi Lim & Hui Zhong Shen, 2006), very few has been done so as to explain how computer-based technology has impacted on the teaching and learning of English language in a number of different ways, and especially in non-English speaking contexts. Actually, a review of the literature relating to this in both English and non-English speaking countries shows that while there is a significant body of theoretical literature relating the benefits of using such technologies, there has not been many rigorous and systematic studies that have investigated their impact on teaching and learning(Bennett & Lockyer, 1999). More importantly is the case of EFL contexts, notably the teaching of English in Algerian universities, which suffer a lack of the convenient and reliable technology (hardware and software) and the necessary technical support. In most cases, the technological equipment of teaching departments poses the greatest hurdles depending on forces beyond faculty control and on institutional decisions which are generally based on

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financial rather than pedagogical grounds. Therefore, of the very few experiments undertaken at the level of our universities, teachers remain the sole seduced parts of the educational field in the unparalleled results that networked teaching may offer. These supporters of technology integration seem to do that, not because they are convinced of the richness of the Web resources, but because they believe that our students would realize unseen interest and involvement in the CALL classroom. Yet, it is still a wonder that Algerian teachers would be able to manage between their pedagogical aims and their mastery of the technology!

Besides, it is worth mentioning that even at a broader level, the limited number of studies that have been conducted in the field, have been solely devoted to the description of internet information sites or internet based-lessons inspired from experiments that have already been conducted in the field. Their lack of clarity and expertise, as the vast amount of time taken up in technology implementations and the sensitive nature of the field, which is regularly submitted to constant change, make them regularly criticised and not welcomed by conservatives of the profession.(McKenzie,1995 and Bennett & Lockyer,1999) .

Hence, the review of the literature relating to the impact of computer based technologies on teaching and learning shows that the fields of interest that have received little but insufficient attention (Vijendra Lal, 2002) relate to:

- Teachers' perception of the technology;
- Learners' perceptions of the technology;
- Impact of computer technologies on learning outcomes;
- Impact of computer technologies on the learning environment of classrooms including the learning activities which take place in the classroom and the teaching and learning strategies used to facilitate them;
- The technology infrastructure of educational institutions and related issues like access;
- Professional development activities to support teachers
- Factors influencing the integration of computer based technologies in the classroom
- Impact of computer technologies on different student groups.

Our hypothesis, then, presupposes that technology integration in the teaching field would enhance our students reshape their appreciation of the literature subject (Yang, 2003). It not only would disregard the pre-existing differences that distinguish between learners of native language and learners of a foreign language, but also it would help overcome the cultural obstacles that have for so a long time stuck to foreign learners and hampered them from a genuine acquisition of the language. In fact, we see in the computer assistance *the* means to implement a collaborative approach of learning inside the foreign literature classroom.

Thus, both institutional and educational predispositions to improve English language teaching in general and foreign literature teaching in particular in a web-enhanced environment are questioned raising the following questions:

1- Is any research being conducted to define the incorporation of the internet in the teaching field Algerian universities?

2- What could be the impact of this technological revolution on a better delivery of foreign literature at the higher educational level?

3- Would the use of electronic sources improve the dramatic situation of literature teaching in our universities?

The purpose of this study is to provide these questions with empirical evidence and use the findings as a starting point for the description of a set of holistic guidelines for internet use in foreign literature classrooms. We will first provide an overview of the supporting literature on internet use in educational settings. Second, we will wonder about the Algerian university's efforts to integrate this technology inside the classroom. Third, we will describe the context in which foreign literature is actually delivered to university learners of English language and shed some light on the reasons behind its rejection by these same learners. Finally, we will attempt to suggest a set of recommendations on internet best employment by foreign literature teachers so as to save the literature subject from the drastic decline it is suffering from.

2-A Review of the Literature of Internet Use in Educational Settings

An important portion of the literature concerning the use of the internet in educational settings shows that the worth of this technology is undeniable, *"along with word processing, the internet may be the most valuable of the many computer technologies available to teachers and students"* (Becker:1999, p.32), yet, this same literature shows that very little has been said about the effective use of the technology so as to nurture teachers' pedagogical goals still less on the impact of such use.

As far as this technology use in classrooms is concerned, the literature regarding its overall employment revealed that it : **1**-is a means to increase access to information; **2**- offers the opportunity for students to apply critical thinking skills while using it; **3**- facilitates collaboration and communication, both within the class and around the world; **4**- can increase availability to diverse resources and multiple perspectives and therefore lead to more complex and challenging research projects; **5**- can assist and challenge students to construct meaning for themselves; and, most dangerously, **6**-is not used effectively by most teachers(Shiveley & VanFossen, 2005).

Certainly, the internet stands as the first place where both students and teachers draw their information from when in need. The rapidity through which information is delivered and the availability of the huge amount of data on almost every topic presupposes that both actors of the educational contract possess specific skills to assess information (McKenzie, 1998, Shaw, 1998, Shiveley and VanFossen, 2005). However, students' skills, which appear in their acquaintance with the technology, do not seem sufficient in making them handle the overload of information readily available on the internet. Their lack of proficiency in the domain would require the constant help of teachers, whose, in fact, maturity and experience would be urgently needed to transmit the critical thinking skills vital to decipher and process the information. Hence, the teacher's burden in the experiment is more demanding, for, his/her contribution would be genuine and targeted.

This same literature seems to support the idea that if these skills are learned, the students would develop a way of thinking that would challenge the old-fashioned one imposed by the traditional classroom setting, besides; they would enlarge their perspectives by enriching their multicultural exchange without having to afford the fees of an expensive travel. The continuous collaboration inside and outside the classroom, via the internet, would enhance students engage in more daring project researches as the foreign literature subject. Again, the internet stands as a powerful source of research that may challenge Algerian students to

investigate problems that are authentic, connected to the curriculum, and interdisciplinary in nature.

As a conclusion, the review of the literature indicated that despite the many opportunities the internet may provide for revolutionising teaching and learning inside the classroom, it still suffers from a major problem which is the inappropriate exploitation of its potential by teachers. Put differently, of the very few teachers who use the internet in their classrooms, researchers have found that very little has been done to change how content is traditionally transmitted. They seem uninterested to proceed to changes in the delivery of instruction, rather, they use this technology merely to collect information for themselves and distribute it on web pages. Apparently, teachers' phobia with computers impede them to use the internet effectively in their classrooms, the latter would require an acquaintance with the technology, which is time and energy consuming, and that is not grasped by a great majority of teachers. For, many educators avoid deliberately the use of this technology and do not want to go beyond its conceptual aspect to develop a systematic and more organized approach capable to promote the teaching and learning domains (Shiveley and VanFossen, 2005). In this respect, it seems relevant to draw a picture on how Algerian institutions are facing technology integration to improve university teaching.

3-The Use of the ICTs in Algerian Universities

It is comforting to know that the actors of the Algerian education worry about the position of the ICTs use in Algeria, and particularly at universities. In fact, the position of Algeria in terms of ICTs' use appears little promising. More seriously, that situation is incomprehensible especially if we consider the prosperous neighbouring Europe and the enthusiasm of young Algerians to the new technologies. Indeed, the Arab report of 2002 concerning the human development noticed the serious delay of Algeria in the domain, in comparison to Morocco and Tunisia and more importantly to the countries of the Middle East, stating that " *les TIC permettront d'accélérer le rythme du renouvellement de l'information, permettant ainsi aux pays arabes de combler leur retard en matière de connaissance*"[1]. The most recent statistics in terms of internet use show that only 7.3% of Algerians employ this means of communication Vs. 15.6% of Tunisians and 15.1% of Moroccans. Apparently much promising, the project Ousratic[2] has failed to realise the expected results. In fact, the IUT (International Union of Telecommunication) 2006 report has showed that the expectations of the programme about the year 2010 predict less than 10% of Algerian families using the computer in comparison to 20% of Tunisian ones for a similar Tunisian programme.

In this frame of disappointing conditions, the question whether universities should integrate computer assistance in their classrooms seems inappropriate. A. Bessaada[3] seems to think that it would be more urgent to think about the integration of computer laboratories and "classes branchées" open on the world in primary and secondary schools, in other terms, he supports

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[1] A.Bensaada in,' **Plaidoyer pour des classes branchées en Algerie',** in Le Quotidien d'Oran. April, 8th, 2007, Algeria. P.1
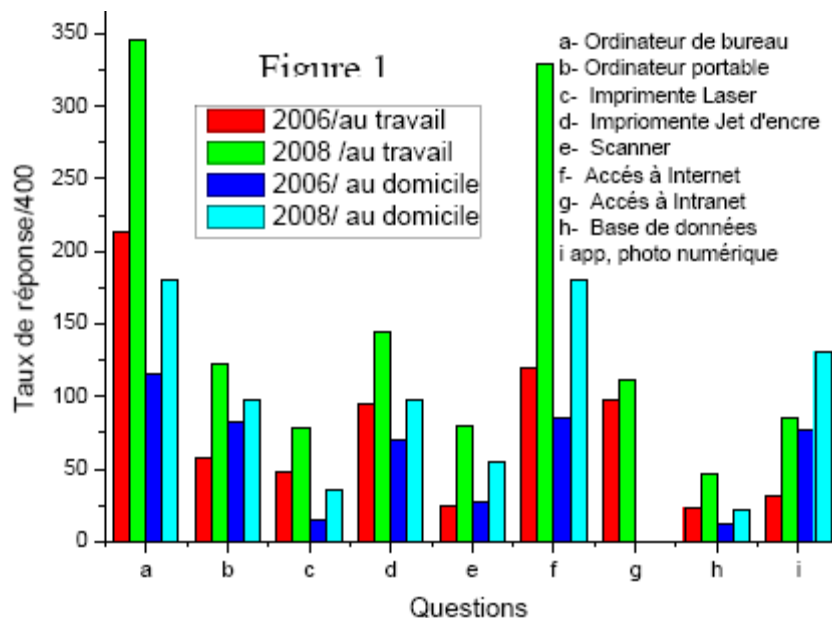[2] Ousratic is a project launched by the Algerian ministry of telecommunication in 2005 and which aimed in fact at providing each Algerian family with a personal computer.
[3] Ahmed Bensaada is an Algerian university teacher during the eighties. He had been vice-head of the Physics' Institute of Oran University. His scopes of interest fall with the conception of educative Web sites in Canada and the use of the ICTs in the promotion of teaching. He worked as a pedagogical advisor for the training of teachers in the faculty of educative sciences in Montréal University.

the integration of the ICTs' use at an early stage of education and holds that only in this way Algerian universities would recover from "la fracture numérique"[4] which paralyses them.

A recent investigation (2008), undertaken with the collaboration of AUF (Agence universitaire de la Francophonie), aimed at assessing the degree of integration of the ICTs by Algerian university teachers in the frame of (Tempus programme 2006-2008). The research covered a sample of 400 Badji Mokhtar Annaba[5] university teachers, from 6 different faculties (18 departments), has demonstrated that the results could be used as a reference for the whole Algerian universities. While the study has showed the advent of Algerian institutions in their use of the internet (Diagram 1) However, it underlined its rudimentary use, merely devoted to emailing and the downloading of software and files. Thus, the research has proposed a more rational use of the technology in the hope to improve the educational strategies at the level of universities.

Diagram 1: Toward an assessment of technology integration in Algerian universities from 2006 to 2008.

Source: Boudour, A., (2008). **L'Avènement des TICs dans l'université Algérienne après deux ans d'expériences sous l'égide de l'AUF**. Paper presented at CEMAFORAD4 Strasbourg, April, 9th, 10th, and 11th.

We are quite conscious that Algeria cannot be compared to one of the industrialised countries, where the technological development has permitted a high jump. Yet, the ICTs are still a recent technology that is not well mastered by actors of education even in the developed countries. Thus, if Algeria urges to join the flaw of technology and invest the necessary material and particularly the adequate training, it will undeniably have the opportunity to overcome the noticeable delay. More importantly, the experience undertaken by countries of

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[4] A. Bensaada, op.,cit., p. 4.
[5] Badji Mokhtar Annaba University is one of the oldest and most prominent institutions of higher education of the Eastern Algeria.

the South[6], and which proved to be a success, should encourage Algeria to engage in a similar enterprise. In this respect, the next section will describe the context in which foreign literature is delivered in Algeria and highlight the major reasons of its rejection by students.

4- Context

What may render the present investigation more interesting is that it is fed from a personal unsatisfactory experience of teaching foreign literature to young Algerian learners. The experiment, as taking place in traditional classroom's setting, seems to count more negatives than positives. A growing dissatisfaction in the delivery of the subject and an attendance at class stimulated by a sole desire to obtain a pass mark, regardless of the quality of the work presented, has fostered our eagerness to unveil the reasons behind such a drastic decline. In a recent research (Djafri:2006), a questionnaire has been devised so as to understand why only 5% of undergraduate students read for memoirs in literature(be it American or British), as opposed to 35% reading for memoirs in linguistics and 33% in American history, the findings attributed the lack of interest in the subject to three main reasons,

1st/ foreign literature is rejected because difficult or of no interest and this has been showed by 78.6% of the students asked.

2nd/ the inappropriate context for the teaching of foreign literature at the university level since 63.5% of the students revealed their deliberate refusal to interpret the literary text in front of their mates inside the classroom or their impossibility to be given the opportunity to be heard and criticised.

3rd / the socio-cultural obstacles that appear at the level of the contextual interpretation of literary texts, for, 62.4% of the students reject some texts because being incompatible with their own culture.

The findings of the research helped understand two apparently forgotten truths. The first truth concerns the difficulties educators face in communicating the literary experience to young learners (Miall: 1994). Actually, apart from being native or foreign, the teaching of literature in itself is impossible. Northrop Frye, the prominent literary critic, stated openly: "*it is impossible to teach or learn literature: what one teaches or learns is criticism*" (Frye, 1970. p.75). It suggests that whatever approaches and methods are being used, they must seriously understand the sensitivity of the enterprise (Ibid, p.84). Indeed, the marginalisation of the subject from the part of learners appears to be teacher-made. Had the teacher reconsidered the pedagogy implemented inside the classroom, she/he would witness a more enthusiastic community of learners. However it is easy to blame the teacher and accuse her/him of all the teaching failures, the latter is limited by the constraints of the traditional classroom, and which in fact does not offer room to realise the goals traced initially. Another neglected truth which should urge educators to look for other more promising teaching environments.

5-Motivation

Wishing to nurture our pedagogical aims so as to enhance our students re-appreciate the world of literature has deepened our support of reader-oriented theory. For, the major premise of reader-oriented theory is that the classroom is no more than a community of readers, able to produce as different interpretations as possible of the same literary text and negotiate its

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[6] By countries of the South we refer to those countries which have engaged in the mastery of the ICTs, for instance: the United Arab Emirates with the project "Internet City" in Dubai, Mauritius Republic with the project "Cyber City", and Malaysia with its project "Multimedia Super Corridor".

meaning within the group's spirit. This same theory presupposes a "collaborative environment" (Woodlief, 1997), with everyone "speaking" and everyone "listening". It also presupposes the acceptance of other outside resources as a kind of huge web of exchange, supervised by the most "experienced reader," the teacher. The aim is to empower students as better readers able to trust their own interpretations and negotiate their ideas in a critical spirit. However, the traditional centred teaching environment, where the teacher plays the role of a *dictator* imposing *his* interpretation on his students, does not offer voice to every student to be heard or criticised. The core of the theory, which rests on a collaborative pedagogy, is being relegated to a mere "spoon-feeding"[7] informational input instructed by the teacher. More importantly is that the classroom seems unable to accomplish the "multi-vocal" process that may create a community of informed readers and which, in fact, requires:

- More effective and student-centred presentation of useful information and open questions about texts and contexts;
- More personalised and self-reliant written productions from each student with feedback in a fully collaborative environment

In the hope to empower our students generate and process[8] information derived from literary texts, taking into account their psychological predispositions and their learning needs, we understood that the ordinary classroom is the inappropriate setting for such a fulfilment. Therefore, we have hypothesised that a likely different teaching environment, where internet is integrated effectively[9], would realize the expected pedagogical goals of a successful autonomous yet guided learning.

6-Questionnaire

In the frame of the above worries, the present paper reports a small-scale study, undertaken as a preliminary investigation in university educational settings. Through the introduction of a questionnaire to 52 teachers of English language from five universities of the West of Algeria and which includes a section devoted particularly to foreign literatures teachers, the findings have revealed that:

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[7] The term is borrowed from Astrid Ensslin in **Reconstructing the deconstructed- hypertext and literary education** (Language & Literature 2004; 13; 307).
[8] « We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to (…) take part in the process of knowledge- getting. Knowing is a process not a product." (Bruner, 1966: 72)
[9] By effective use of internet, we mean an interesting supply of hypertext curricula with a rich assortment of information types.
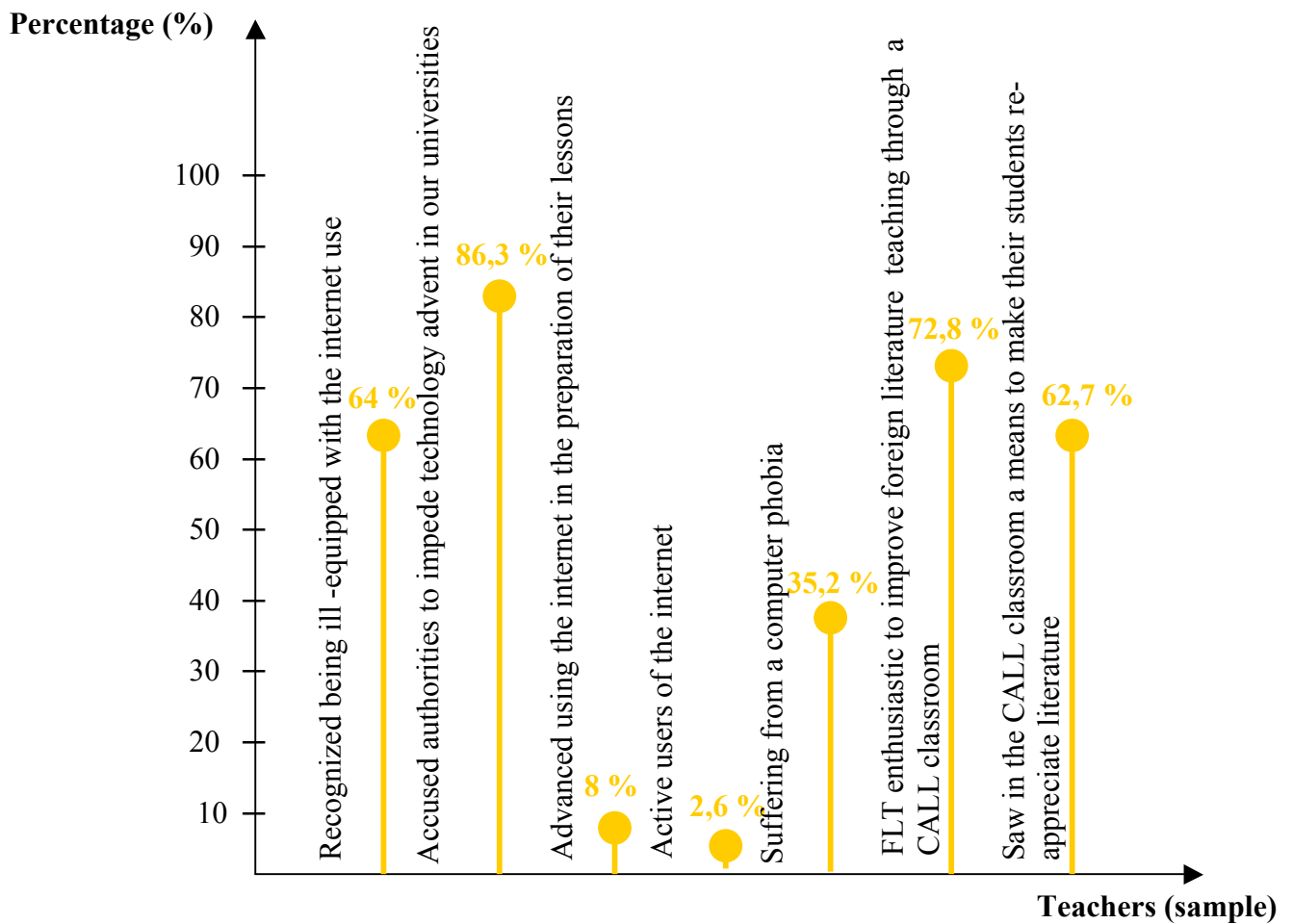
Percentage (%)

Diagram 2: Analysis of the Findings

7-Discussion

One of the major difficulties we encountered to confirm the hypothesis claimed at the beginning of this research has to do with the poor-technological equipment of our departments. On the one hand, it is clear that Algerian universities are facing acute budgetary constraints in spite of the growing demand of their services, yet, on the other hand, their support of a quantitative policy, which aims at producing a maximum of graduate students a year (See table1), regardless of their effectiveness in professional spheres, stands as an incomprehensible truth. Moreover, the huge number of students and the inappropriate infrastructure in which teaching is delivered do not help the implementation of an up-to-date pedagogy, notably the incorporation of computer assistance in the teaching of English language. Therefore, and as mentioned earlier, the very few isolated and occasional experiments undertaken in Algeria have been carried out informally by researchers, very often

benefiting from government's grants as unique source of funding[10]. These obstacles are not to be neglected, for, despite the noble intention of the teacher, the lack of material comfort, i.e. technology availability, renders the mission impossible to be fulfilled.

Table 1: Number of undergraduate students in Algerian universities						
1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2001	2004
1137	12243	57445	181350	466084	552804	700000

Source: Saad, M., Zawdie, G., Derbal, A., Lee, R., (2006). **Issues and Challenges arising from greater role of the university in promoting innovation in developing countries: a comparative study of experiences in Malaysia, Algeria and Ethiopia** available at www.triplehelix5.com.

However, contrary to held beliefs, the technological equipment of schools is not the miraculous remedy. By now, a question raises itself: what would be a highly- equipped school without the adequate agents qualified to manage that technology? In more explicit words, teachers are the first who should benefit form an appropriate training in the domain so that they would be able to handle effectively these new technologies in their daily use. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between the effective use of the ICTs and their mere use as a support. Algerian agents of education should be aware that the use of the ICTs in the teaching domain is not a fashion, which one day or another will vanish, on the contrary, these technologies reshape our acquisition of knowledge, and modify our way of communicating and are an effective tool for the "democratisation of knowledge"[11]. Nevertheless, one should not embody the passive role of user of technology rather; one should strive to foster a spirit of collaboration through these technologies.

Indeed, the picture about how the internet is being used by teachers who are using is not satisfying at all, at least for the time being context. For most teachers, the use of the internet is no more than a way to show their involvement in the technology trend or show their literacy in the field. One of the premise of technology incorporation is to make students self –reliant in their acquisition of the foreign language and empower them to be active learners and relegate the teacher's role to a mere coach. However, the way technology is being employed by our teachers still perpetuates the traditional fill in method by facilitating students' access to the huge amount of content and neglecting their role in the acquisition.

Finally, the most striking revelation of the questionnaire lies in the fact that a great number of foreign literature teachers have manifested their desire to embark upon the adventure of joining international standards. They seem optimistic about the promising results that might be enhanced by the technology assistance inside classrooms of foreign literature teaching. More explicitly, they see in the technology integration an opportunity to enrich the circle of exchange and facilitate their students' acquisition of knowledge. Yet, they also have showed a very weak acquaintance with the technology and which, in their sense, should be overcome urgently.

8- Prospects

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[10] Sources of funding in Algeria are limited to government's grants, contrary to industrialised countries where even private national or international companies finance scientific projects and thus contribute to the advent of technology in order to meet the economic market's needs.

[11] A.Bensaada, op., cit., p.5.

Although the study is based on the analysis of a small number of sources, there seems to be a broad general agreement on providing guidelines for internet use in English language classrooms in general and foreign literature ones in particular. In order to be meaningful, then, classroom Internet use should place students in positions where they use and extend prior knowledge that expand their interests or experiences. However, this same study confirms that such an achievement would not be realised without a targeted equipment of the first actors of education; teachers.

Our expectations about effective technology integration in Algerian universities are optimistic despite the early stages of the experiment. More comfortingly, are the efforts Algerian educational institutions, very often in collaboration with European ones, are doing to improve teachers equipment with technology. In fact a series of scientific projects, which consist in serving teachers with the adequate training in the mastery of ICTs and their use in the teaching domain so as consider them as effective and active agents of change in the Algerian education is being launched by the ministry of higher education. The Ide@ project, for instance and which has been financed for a period of three years (2005-2008) by the European Tempus Programme, is the fruit of a partnership between Europe and Algeria. The project aims at employing the ICTs in the higher educational field and develops a more enhancing training about the internet use in Algeria. In this respect, Ide@ aims at creating an academic degree, the professional master Ide@, devoted to the use of the ICTs at universities for the teaching field. To this end, Ide@ relies on UTICEF Master delivered at Louis Pasteur University (Strasbourg 1, France), with a partnership of Mon-Hainaut University (Belgium), University of Geneva (Tecfa) , and the AUF organisation. The objective is to develop a similar degree in Algeria but modified according to local needs and necessities.
The master will be deployed on seven Algerian universities, partners of the project, and will strive to equip teachers with the capacity to integrate the ICTs in their pedagogy. At the end of their degree, these teachers will be able to conceive, organise, and supervise similar educational projects in our universities (Faouzia Messaouidi, 2007)

Therefore, the present investigation promotes the idea of passing on as much room as possible to the integration of the internet in the teaching of English language in Algerian universities and supports the elaboration of projects in collaboration with foreign universities More exactly, with regard to teaching foreign literature, this will imply a radical shift: a departure from the archaic traditional pedagogy towards the implementation of a literary hypertext education, where collaboration and constructivism stand as major paradigms. No longer should the teacher embody the role of omniscient, unique source of knowledge, through which he/she used to spoon-feeds his/her learners, on the contrary, he/she is supposed to step back and become classroom manager, who, from the background, comment if required, trigger ideas, give feedback, praise and reprimand, serve as example, but by no means prescribe everything that has to be learnt. The role of the teacher, weakened though it may be, is indispensable (Dam, 1990; Little, 1995 in Ensslin, 2004). Hence, implementing a hypertext education involves a wide range of skills. Not only do teachers of foreign literature need to develop their literary, linguistic, and intercultural competence, but also they need to develop a media competence[12]. Hardly any teacher of literature can pride themselves on exhaustive computer and internet literacy or, generally speaking, media competence. Therefore, all available competencies on the students' and the teachers' parts have to be drawn on,

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[12] By *media competence* it is referred to the technological literacy of teachers, explained by Ensslin; 2004, op., cit., p.318.

encouraging, then, a collectivist educational approach that might in the present context cure the teaching of foreign literature.

9-Conclusion

The available research literature on the use of Internet for general classroom teaching and the use of the Internet in the foreign literature classroom in the Algerian university in particular, tells us that most teachers do not use the internet on a regular basis and that those who do usually do without changing much in their traditional approach to teaching. This remains the case despite the long-standing and widely held acknowledgment for the great potential of the Internet for improving foreign literature teaching. We have suggested a set of recommendations to assist in developing a more structured and intentional use of this technology. To this end and despite our financial paralysis, we support the elaboration of similar projects like the Ide@ project to train foreign literature teachers manipulate the internet effectively in their classrooms and make of them agents of change of a critical thinking. We believe that learning by literary hypertext serves modern-day multidisciplinary educational requirements, for, generally speaking, Algerian students cannot be expected to want to learn anything the existence or learnability of which they are not aware of. It is our hope that the foreign literature classrooms in Algerian universities will move beyond the level of theoretical suggestions of the potential of internet use toward the implementation of an effective pedagogy and as such contribute to reattribute the subject the worthy position it used to have.

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