Multi-Sensory Delivery in EFL 'Smart' Classrooms: Students' Perceptions of Benefits, Limitations and Challenges

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Abstract

The present study investigates the impact of multi-sensory delivery- The multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image, sound, video) - on students' English language learning. It gives a comprehensive overview of multi-sensory delivery in English language teaching through reviewing literature, critically analysing potential benefits and concerns about the use of digital tools and platforms in the language classroom; then moves to examine, through the use of an interpretive qualitative study, students' perception of the impact of multi-sensory delivery on their language learning. According to the findings, multi-sensory delivery in the English language classroom has mostly generated improvements in students' language skills, increased their interest in learning and ensured a more interactive and varied learning in the classroom. The study also implies that students are not quite sure whether it helps improve performance on written class assessment and that low achievers are more likely to be left behind.

Key terms: *Multi-sensory delivery; Smart classrooms; English language learning*

1. Introduction

Research rationale, significance and objectives

Morocco has recently invested heavily in a long term knowledge growing and sharing strategy and launched a set of digital projects to develop and promote its socio-economic, cultural and educational potentials to bridge the gap with emerging and leading world economies. The digital projects and the educational ones in particular are an extension of national efforts to establish an electronic platform open to all schools, colleges and universities and create digital material to boost research purposes, optimize learning and maintain linguistic and cultural diversity.

The ministry of National and Higher Education, Professional Training and Scientific Research has, with the support of different national and international bodies and governmental and non-governmental agencies, implemented an active policy of promoting and incorporating Information and Communication Technologies in the educational system, monitoring training programmers, designing digital teaching material and disseminating and sharing model experiences in teaching in general and in teaching foreign languages in particular.

Curricular integration of ICT offers access to a set of electronic facilities such as interactive video, the Internet, e-mail and the World Wide Web which, as many researchers and ELT trainers argue, can help learners acquire linguistic skills, establish contact and interaction with other language users and broaden their minds about other values and contemporary practices in countries where English is used as a mother tongue or as a second language.

Incorporating multi sensory delivery in language teaching will give students a large number of benefits to broaden their opportunities in successfully acquiring a foreign language. These advantages range from enhancing motivation to promoting autonomous learning, fostering critical thinking skills,

encouraging innovation, establishing interaction, boosting communication, promoting research and optimising cooperative learning.

However and against the hasty decision to use ICT in the Moroccan English language classroom, more research is needed to redefine and revisit ICT- aided language teaching practices and the expected learning outcomes. A major question remains about how successful the use of multimedia technology is going to improve foreign language instruction. The challenges that many EFL teachers encounter while attempting trying to integrate ICT and multi sensory delivery in particular in their teaching, have triggered debates and growing concerns about the real utility of ICT use in the language classroom. Do these benefits provide tangible evidence for the improvement and optimisation of English language teaching and learning or are just ornaments that are beautiful rather than useful? In the light of the current debate, the aim of this paper is to report on a small scale investigation which explores and assesses students' perception of the utility of multi sensory delivery in the English language classroom.

Research question

1. What are the students' perceptions, attitudes and expectations from the use of the multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image, sound, video) in the English language classroom?

2-Theoretical background

Multi sensory delivery is an advantage of using ICT in the English language classroom. Well designed applications present content in a variety of media formats- providing sound, text, graphics and video- and allow students to use their own individual learning styles. (Linda E. Reksten, 2000). Multimedia is one very good answer for teachers looking to address students' different learning styles. It is a combination of text, video, sound, and graphic animation. (Iwabushi and Fotos ,2004). Students, whatever their learning style is, can always benefit from the used teaching material. Soo and Nycow (1996), too have found that a multimedia English proficiency programme benefited learners with all three perceptual learning styles- auditory, visual and kinaesthetic as well. Multi sensory delivery not only has the potential to cater for different learning styles but also enables students to grasp difficult concepts through visual multimedia formats available on most Internet websites (Linda E. Reksten , 2000). A simple interactive video link would alleviate the burden of bringing realia into the language classroom.

M. Rajeshwar (2001) argues that multimedia delivery offers a high degree of flexibility in learning. The multimedia environment appeals to the senses of seeing and hearing which traditional teaching aids can not. P. Shailaja (2001) backs up M. Rajeshwar's argument and adds that *'Hypertext provides a number of advantages for language learning. A more authentic learning environment is created since listening is combined with seeing in the real world and skills are easily integrated.'*p.3. Moreover, multimedia computer applications help keeping track of students' progress and providing them with immediate feedback. G. Damodar (2001)

Another benefit of multi-sensory delivery use in the English language classroom is the abundance of authentic teaching material. The Internet provides a wealth of information which can support and broaden students' knowledge and skills within English lessons. (Carol Evans, 2009). CALL software stimulates the natural language learning process, focusing on listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking and writing which all offer authentic, real world content. They provide learners with real life images, written text and voices of native speakers. (Linda E. Reksten 2000).

Using blogs, wikis and podcasts to publish students' assignments and classroom productions for potential authentic readers to share increases students' motivation and interest in learning. When learners know that their submissions have a purpose and are meant for someone to read, they are more likely to participate and produce. Lori L. Ramirez (2010), in his book, *Empower English learners with tools from the web* argues that publishing student work to the World Wide Web is a means of

providing an authentic global audience for classroom productions. EFL teachers in many parts of the world encourage their students to use blogs, wikis, podcasts and social networking media to post classroom productions, which makes English language learning more purposeful and motivating. When students write or speak for a broader and more international audience, they are more likely to polish their work, think more deeply about the content they produce and pay more attention to cultural norms and differences.

Moreover students feel more engaged and motivated when authentic material is used to support learning and when their teachers use cues such as sound, pictures, and videos. The use of blogs has brought a large set of potential benefits. Nat Garney (2009) argues that blogs as a communicative medium expose learners to authentic language and linguistic experiences, which has become a cornerstone of language teaching.

However, ICT use in English language teaching and multi sensory delivery, in particular, have their limitations as well. The cultural component of teaching material can be challenging. The substantial availability of original, authentic texts, and also, more recently, audio and DVD files, can provide instant contact and stimulus for the language learners. However, such material, produced for native speakers of the language, can, for many language learners and their teachers , be viewed as 'difficult and the subject matter may relate to a culture of which the learner has little or no experience. (Michael J. Evans. and contributors, 2009)

An appropriate use of ICT in English language teaching and multi sensory delivery in particular requires adequate training and pedagogical planning. Novice teachers with little experience in using technology often presume that merely transforming a language classroom activity into a web or ICT format will guarantee its success for students. Any English language teaching activity without careful and adequate pedagogical planning- Technologically enabled or not- will produce irrelevant and unsatisfactory results and outcomes, even if multimedia use makes it look attractive and appealing. (Robert J. Blake ,2008)

3-Methodology

A focus group interview was used to collect responses from students. The focus group interview was conducted in April 2012. Students were notified a week before to get ready for the interview. Table 1 shows the main sections of the focus group interview

Table 1. Main sections of the focus group interview

Objective	To determine students' attitudes perceptions and expectations from the use of multi-sensory delivery in the English language classroom and see if there is any research evidence on how multi-sensory delivery can boost English language learning achievement
Total number of participants	10 students from an experimental group whose instruction included ICT use in English classes.
Total focus group time	90 minutes
Break	10 minutes

Overall question to answer in focus group discussions
What are your perceptions, attitudes and expectations from the use of the multimedia environment of the Internet in the English language classroom?

Questions	
1	What role did your teacher play in an English multimedia- enhanced classroom and how important was his presence?
2	To what extent was the multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image, sound, video) accessible and useful to students?
3	Did you enjoy the English multimedia- enhanced classroom experience and were the activities relevant to your present use of English?

| 4 | Do you think the use of ICT multimedia environment will bring more advantages than disadvantages to students' learning? If so, what are they? |
| 5 | Did the use of the multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image sound, video) help you gain confidence as a learner and improve your learning experience and performance on class assessment? |

4- Presentation and discussion of results

1-Teacher roles

Question 1: What role did your teacher play in an English multimedia- enhanced classroom and how important was his presence?

When asked to answer question **1** and provide their perceptions of their teacher's roles and presence in an English multimedia- enhanced classroom, students listed a set of perceived roles. They were as follows:

<div align="center">Participants' perceptions of Teacher utility and roles</div>

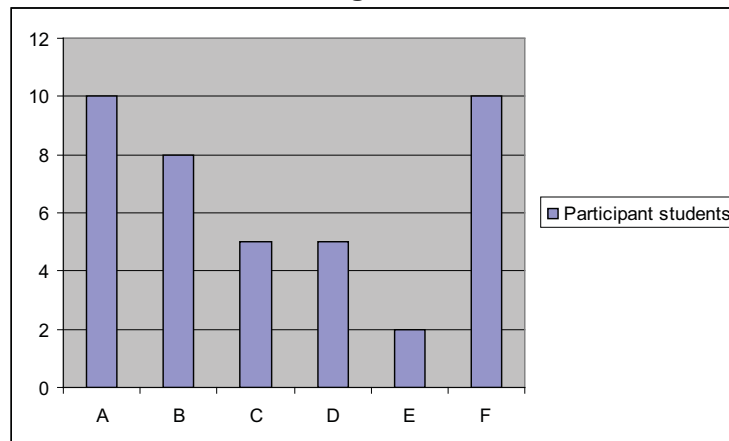| A | The teacher played a key role in the classroom and his presence was important |
B	He monitored students' work and helped them make maximum benefit from the course
C	He used the technology and helped students' grasp difficult concepts
D	He involved students in classroom activities and asked for opinions and comments
E	He adapted web content to meet class objectives
F	He facilitated multimedia teaching content

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that 10 participant students (100 %) thought that the teacher played a key role in the classroom and his presence was definitely important, which rejects the popular view that computers may substitute teachers in the future. They also felt that he facilitated multimedia teaching content which enhances the role of the teacher as a facilitator regardless of the teaching setting whether it is a multimedia enhanced environment or a conventional classroom. 8 participant students (80%) believed that he monitored students' work and helped them make maximum benefit from the course. 5 participant students (50%) thought that the teacher used the technology to help students' grasp difficult concepts, involved students in classroom activities and asked for their opinions and comments. This reinforces the claim that ICT-enabled teaching and multi-sensory delivery in particular boosts interaction and optimises comprehension. However there were only two participant students (20%) who believed the teacher adapted web content to meet class objectives, which reveals

that the teacher's key role is to make sure ICT material match the topic and purpose of the lesson and relate technology use to course goals

2-Access and usefulness

Question 2: To what extent was the multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image, sound, video) accessible and useful to students?

When asked to answer question **2** and provide their perceptions of the usefulness and accessibility of teaching material in an English multimedia- enhanced classroom, students listed a set of perceived benefits. They were as follows:

Participants' perceptions of the usefulness and access to multimedia material

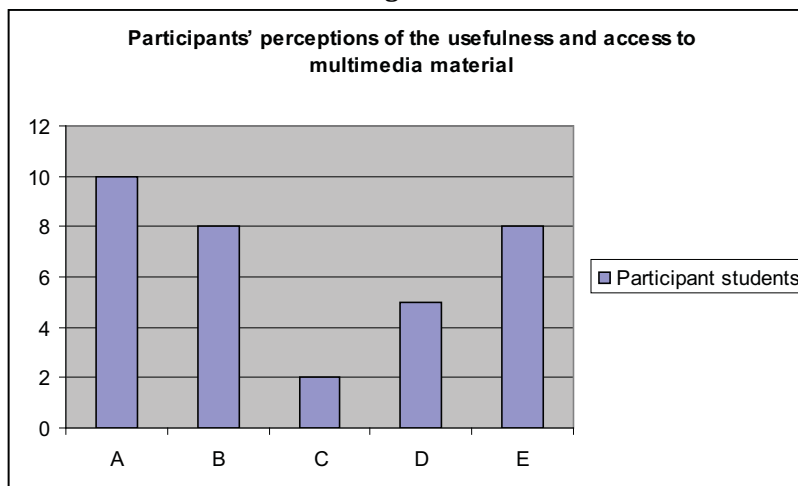|	
A	The multimedia environment of the Internet enhanced learning and vocabulary memorization in particular
B	The multimedia environment of the Internet corrected and improved students' pronunciation
C	The multimedia environment of the Internet improved teacher performance
D	The multimedia environment of the Internet facilitated comprehension and understanding
E	The use of the data show made material accessible for everybody

Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that 10 participant students (100 %) thought that the multimedia environment of the Internet enhanced learning and vocabulary memorization in particular, which confirms the substantial power of the picture and the video to help students remember particular items, facts and events from different learning situations. 8 participant students (80%) believed that the multimedia environment of the Internet corrected and improved students' pronunciation and that the use of the data show made material accessible for everybody. This shows that the use of authentic listening material optimises learning and that the one-computer classroom is a more practical and less expensive substitute for computer laboratories. 5 participant students (50%) thought that the multimedia environment of the Internet facilitated comprehension and allowed students to understand better. Two more students have even felt that the multimedia environment of the Internet has improved teacher performance, which is an extension of students' role in the language classroom.

3-Content relevance

Question 3: Did you enjoy the English multimedia- enhanced classroom experience and were the

activities relevant to your present use of English?

When asked to answer question **3** and provide their perceptions of content relevance to their present use of English in an English multimedia- enhanced classroom, students listed a set of perceived uses. They were as follows:

Participants' perception of content relevance to their present use of English

A	Learning was fun and allowed students to discover other cultures
B	It was more dynamic. It helped students improve their language skills
C	It was not totally different from traditional classrooms but the use of speaking dictionaries was useful
D	It broadened students' knowledge about the course theme
E	The use of speaking dictionaries and translators helped students with translation tasks
F	Helped students select appropriate web material

Figure 3

Participants' perception of content relevance to their present use of English
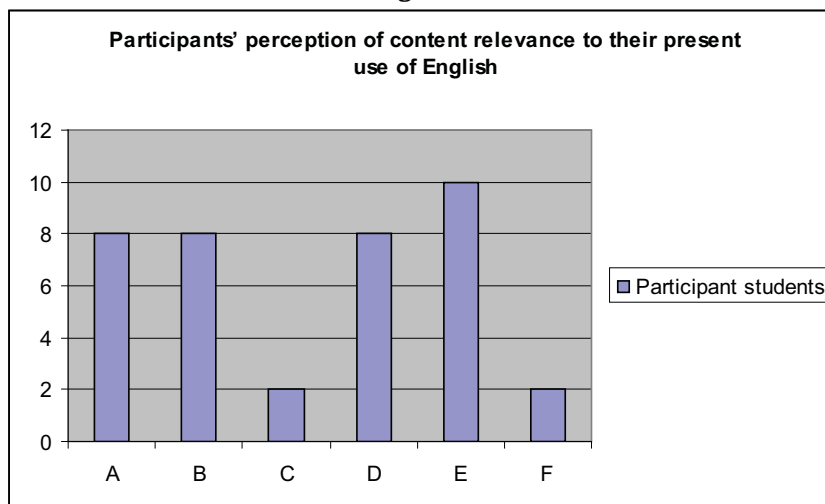
Figure 3 shows that 10 participant students (100 %) thought that the use of speaking dictionaries and translators helped students with translation tasks. Translation, both 'Thème' and 'Version' is an important component of course content of English in CPGE Schools for different mainstreams (MPSI, PCSI, TSI, BCPST, ECS, ECT, or LSH). 8 participant students (80 %) think learning was fun and allowed students to discover other cultures and improve their language skills and broadened their knowledge about the course theme. However 2 participant students (20 %) said that the multimedia environment of the Internet was not totally different from traditional classrooms but they confessed that the use of speaking dictionaries was useful. Experience has shown that the use of speaking dictionaries and translators motivates students and turns the classroom into an attractive learning environment.

4-Perceived utility

Question 4: Do you think the use of the multimedia environment of the Internet will bring more advantages than disadvantages to students' learning? If so, what are they?

When asked to answer question **4** and provide their perceptions of the advantages and the disadvantages of English multimedia- enhanced classroom, students listed a set of perceived benefits and limitations. They were as follows:

Participants' perception of Internet multimedia environment utility

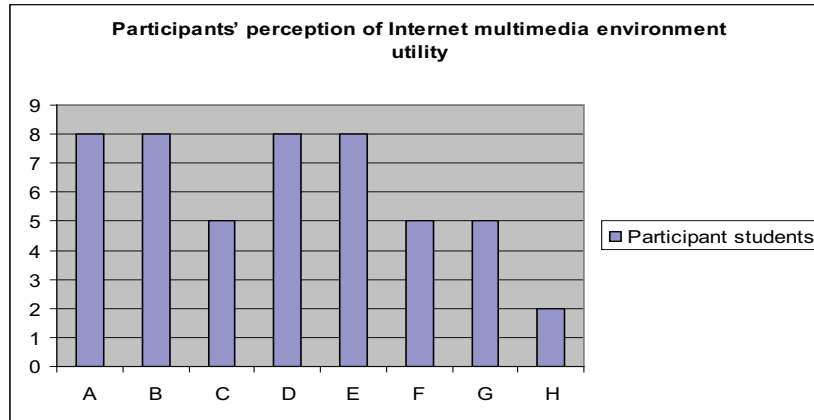| A	Allows more participation and interaction
B	A means to motivate and engage students
C	Encourage collaboration and creativity
D	Broaden students' minds about other cultures and communities
E	Make English class less tiring and more exciting
F	Facilitate reception and assimilation of input
G	Helps only good students. Under achievers find it difficult to follow
H	The student's role in the classroom is a passive one

Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that 8 participant students (80%) thought that the multimedia environment of the Internet and multi-sensory delivery in particular allowed more participation and interaction, motivated and engaged students, broadened students' minds about other cultures and communities and made English classes less tiring and more exciting. CPGE- Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles- students' school schedule is overloaded and English classes are usually scheduled in the afternoon. After a series of classes of Maths and Physics students are more likely to be tired, which makes their engagement hard to ensure. The use of multi-sensory delivery 'alleviates the pain' and involves more the students in class activities. Five interviewees (50%) believe that multi-sensory delivery also encourages collaboration and creativity and facilitates reception and assimilation of input. However 5 interviewees (50%) argue that the multimedia environment of the Internet helps only good students. Under achievers find it difficult to follow. One participant student (10%) believes The student's role in the classroom is a passive one. This clearly shows that students have different expectations and requirements that should be met.

5-Impact on learning achievement

Question 5: Did the use of the multimedia environment of the Internet (e.g. text, image sound, video) help you improve your learning experience and performance on class assessment?

When asked to answer question **5** and provide their perceptions of the contribution of multimedia-enhanced English teaching to improving their learning experience and performance on class assessment. Students listed the following items :

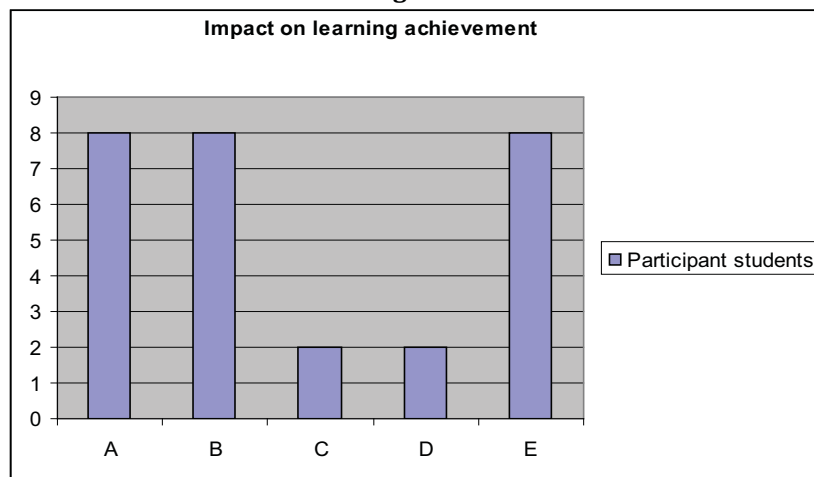| A	Helped us a lot with our colles/ oral tests
B	Not quite sure whether it improves performance on written class assessment
C	Has improved my learning experience
D	It did not make any difference
E	Helped us a lot with our translation tasks

Figure 5

Figure 5 shows that 8 participant students (80%) thought that multimedia- enhanced English teaching and multi-sensory delivery in particular helped them with translation tasks and their colles/oral tests however they were not quite sure whether it improved performance on written class assessment. 2 participant students (20%) said it improved their learning experience. Two other participant students (20%) even claimed that it did not make any difference. Most students had a positive attitude towards multi-sensory delivery and thought it would improve their learning experience but there were fears that underachievers would be left behind. Multimedia- enhanced English teaching requires students to cooperate more and be providers of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The study reports and confirms findings suggested by research conducted elsewhere. Multi-sensory delivery in EFL 'smart' classrooms offers a large set of benefits. It allows more participation and interaction, encourages collaboration and creativity, motivates and engages students and broadens their minds about other cultures and communities. But and against the popular view that computers may substitute teachers in the future, participant students found that the teacher played a key role in the classroom and his presence was important. He monitored students' work and helped them make maximum benefit from the course. He also used the technology to help students' grasp difficult concepts. Any English language teaching activity without careful and adequate pedagogical planning-Technologically enabled or not- will produce irrelevant and unsatisfactory results and outcomes, even if multimedia use makes look attractive and appealing.

Moreover and this is what probably distinguishes this study, multi-sensory delivery in EFL 'smart' classrooms can be used to cope with the fatigue that students may experience in afternoon English language classes. After a series of morning classes of Maths and Physics students are more likely to be tired, which makes their engagement hard to ensure. Multi-sensory delivery also offers strategies whereby a compromise between the syllabus requirements-Communication and intercultural awareness and students' needs- improving performance on written class assessment to fulfil graduation requirements- can be made. However the study has also implied that low achievers find it hard to follow, which is likely to make them lag behind.

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