



Technology and English Language Learning in Saudi Arabia's Secondary Education: A Case Study Of *Imam Al-Zahabi High School* in Sharurah

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Abstract: This paper investigates the use of technology as a pedagogical tool in secondary education in Saudi Arabia. It explores the extent to which the widespread use of technology in all areas of life in Saudi Arabia affects the field of education, and English language learning in particular. Grounded in a descriptive method and a quantitative approach, the study is carried out in a randomly chosen high school known as *Imam Al-Zahabi High School* in Sharurah**, Najran Province, south of Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study clearly establish a current use of technology in the English language classroom and posit that technology appears to be of great benefit to students. After coming up with some recommendations, we propose a set of technology-based communicative activities that can be a source of inspiration for English teachers.

Keywords: attitude, English, learning, secondary education, Saudi Arabia, technology

Resume: Cet article interroge l'utilisation de la technologie comme un outil pédagogique dans l'enseignement secondaire en Arabie Saoudite. Il explore dans quelle mesure l'utilisation généralisée de la technologie dans tous les domaines de la vie en Arabie saoudite affecte le domaine de l'éducation, et l'apprentissage de l'anglais en particulier. Fondée sur une méthode descriptive et une approche quantitative, l'étude est réalisée dans un lycée choisi au hasard connu sous le nom de lycée Imam Al-Zahabi à Sharurah**, dans la province de Najran, au sud de l'Arabie saoudite. Les résultats de l'étude établissent clairement une utilisation actuelle de la technologie dans la classe de langue anglaise et postulent que la technologie semble être d'un grand avantage pour les étudiants. Après avoir formulé quelques recommandations, nous proposons un ensemble d'activités de communication basées sur la technologie qui peuvent être une source d'inspiration pour les professeurs d'anglais.

Mots clefs: attitude, Anglais, apprentissage, enseignement secondaire, Arabie Saoudite, technologie

Introduction

The pervasiveness of technology and its utilization affect every aspect of today's life, more specifically in the field of education, notably with the emergence of equipped language laboratories, educational platforms such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), which deliver free online courses, Blackboard, which is an online teaching and learning platform, and so on. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the use of technology most

appears through the resort to computers, smart phones, websites, social media, the Internet, etc. Following a long established tradition of using visual aids (Bani Hani 2014), the computer is now considered to be a standard tool in language classroom (Singhal 1997).

A medium for language teaching and learning that emerged through the advent of microcomputers and software is known as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). A wide range of computer applications are available now just for language education, putting at the disposal of both instructors and learners: vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation tutors, spell checkers, electronic workbooks, reading and writing programs. Instructors can as well resort to these technologies to create their own materials in supplement of already existing language courses (Singhal 1997).

The use of technology for foreign language education goes back to the sixties and seventies, with the installation of language laboratories arranged in a series of booths, each one equipped with a cassette deck, a microphone and a headphone, allowing language activities grounded in a stimulus-response behaviour pattern. In those labs, second language learning gave a prominent place to drill practices. A number of problems such as pedagogical deficiencies, audio equipment failure, students' boredom, to name but these, finally led to a shift to computer-assisted language learning based on the communicative approach to language teaching (Singhal 1997).

Today, internet information and communication technologies have deeply transformed conventional communicative practices and enabled the emergence of new forms of communicative, cultural, expressive and social activities (Ekoç 2014). The Internet is the latest in a series of technological innovations for second language education (Singhal 1997). The emergence of the Internet as a prominent technology over the past years has pervaded numerous sectors and domains of the modern world in which they are widely used. Coming to the field of education proper, the Internet carries a great potential for both second and foreign language education (Singhal 1997).

The use of free messaging apps in EFL classes contribute to enhancing communicative competence (Zhang 2016). With the Internet, social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok have left their distinctive marks on language learning. The phrase "social media" refers to forms of electronic communication – such as websites for social networking and microblogging – through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other contents such as



videos¹. Today's teachers who prove to be incompetent regarding the use of technology as a tool in their classrooms turn out to be instructors worthy of another age (Tafazoli *et al.* 2018).

Based on a descriptive method and a quantitative approach, the present study is concerned with the place of technology in the English language classroom in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Saudi learners' perceptions thereof. As the use of technology is widespread in Saudi Arabia, it is worth investigating whether this prominent use is also current, or common, in the teaching and learning of English in the kingdom's high schools. To carry out the study, we randomly chose a high school known as *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, Sharurah, Najran Province, Saudi Arabia.

The first part of the paper deals with a brief overview of ELT in Saudi Arabia. The second part states the problem. The third part specifies the purpose of the study and its significance. The fourth part sheds light on the concept of technology and reviews the extent literature about the use of technology as a pedagogical tool for the teaching and learning of English. The fifth part is about the methodology that props up the study, notably the research instrument and procedures. The sixth part of the study analyzes the data collected first, then comes up with a set of recommendations. The seventh and last part of the study proposes simple models of technology-based communicative activities that break with the traditional use of textbooks and enhance communicative competence if done on a regularly basis.

I – English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia

English is the main foreign language taught in Saudi Arabia, due to the prominent role it plays in a wide range of social, economic, professional and educational domains in the kingdom, as well as its status of global language in the 21st century. It is not only the one foreign language taught in all state schools in Saudi Arabia, but it is also a core subject at all school levels: primary, intermediate and secondary (Alqahtani 2019).

In a historical survey of the presence of the English language in Saudi Arabia, Alshahrani (2016) identifies two distinct periods, with the September 11 events set as the landmark that separates them. The introduction of English in Saudi Arabia dates back from the late 1920s, prior to the discovery of oil in the kingdom. English was then welcomed not only with little importance, but also with resistance by a society which looked upon it as a threat to its mother tongue, culture, customs and religion. Accordingly, the teaching and learning of English did not enjoy great prestige in the kingdom for about seven decades as the Saudi society did not hold in high esteem the English language.



The discovery of oil in the early 1930s ignited interest in the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, with Saudi Arabia's important oil reserves, the world in general, the Anglo-Saxon world in particular, with the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), turned its attention to this country of the Middle East for the commercial and economic benefits it offered. Faruk states that the increasingly close relationships between Saudi Arabia and the USA accounted for the importance granted to both English and English language teaching as they more relevantly contributed to the economic and social development of the kingdom than ever before (Alshahrani 2016). As Mahboob and Elyas rightly put it, English was then closely associated with the discourse of petroleum (Alshahrani 2016). With the pivotal role of the oil industry in the development of English, the notion of "petro-linguistics" was coined to label the study of the dynamics of oil and the spread of English in the Arabian Gulf region, Saudi Arabia included. In a nutshell, economic demand and social imperative boosted English language education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The following decades witnessed a set of fundamental legislations on the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia (Alshahrani 2016).

Alqahtani (2019) notes that education actors in Saudi Arabia have displayed considerable interest in developing English language teaching policies, curricula and methodologies. ELT policy in Saudi Arabia has evolved over the years since English was first introduced as a school subject more widely in the 1930s with the discovery of oil; then, it became compulsory at the intermediate and secondary level in 1958. The Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) of that time had formulated a complete English language curriculum for intermediate-level schools (Grades 7-9) and secondary-level schools (Grades 10-12).

Over the period 1970-2001, the Saudi Ministry of Education defined an EFL teaching policy that had a direct link to the broader curriculum framework and syllabus for each level. The 1970 English language syllabus specified instrumental goals such as targeting students' ability to read and thereby access academic and scientific knowledge in English, and their development of sufficient English proficiency to enter English-medium universities. In addition to the students' acceptance and understanding of other cultures, the goals also targeted the development of critical and creative thinking skills, the achievement of both of which was mainly based on the development of the four basic skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) as well as on an emphasis on understanding the value of EFL learning for economic, social and cultural purposes (Alqahtani 2019).

In the 1990s, the Saudi government set up globalization and modernization policies that gave a prominent place to English in the kingdom. In the early 1990s, the government developed a policy of affirmative action for Saudis, commonly known as "Saudisation", which urged Saudi nationals to learn English since proficiency in English gave access to valuable jobs such as service industry positions, etc. Alshahrani (2016) expounds that the events of September 11, 2001 opened up a new era in the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, Saudi authorities initiated promotion policies for English, which had an impact on ELT in the kingdom as well as on the kingdom itself, and which most definitely marked a real shift and enhanced the status of this language.

Aljohani (2016) too refers to the September 11 events as the opening of a new era. For a long time, prior to this fateful date, many Saudi companies had advocated teaching English to their workers. Among those companies, stood out the Saudi Arabian oil company, known as ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company). In the health field, professionals had to communicate and meet patients whose first language is Arabic as well as those who speak English as a second or foreign language. This is partly what had motivated the Saudi government to introduce English as a foreign language into the education system. Intermediate and secondary schools had then been targeted.

Following the September 11 attacks in the USA, there was a debate about introducing English to elementary schools. It was thought that English would interfere with the pupils' abilities to learn Arabic, as the latter might be confused between English classes and the classical Arabic language used to teach religion classes. And, as Aljohani states: "*In 2011, the Ministry of Education ruled that English would be taught as a second language beginning at the 4th grade level in primary schools*" (Aljohani 2016: 362).

Alqahtani (2019), in turn, writes that, over the period 2000-2014, there was a shift in the role of ELT in the education system in Saudi Arabia, due to unsatisfactory English proficiency levels of Saudi intermediate and secondary school leavers. As a result thereof, Saudi authorities made the decision, in 2003, to introduce ELT in all primary schools. One year earlier, the Saudi Ministry of Education had stated the key goals laying the foundations of the English language teaching curriculum:

To provide students with proficiency in English as a way of acquiring knowledge in the fields of sciences, arts and new inventions, and of transferring knowledge and the sciences to other communities, in an effort to contribute to the spread of the faith of Islam and service to humanity. [Ministry of Education, 2002, in Alqahtani (2019: 122)]



Coming to the more recent period 2014-2020, it is characterized by the release of a new English language curriculum for elementary, intermediate and secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. The new curriculum is propped by the following principles:

- 1 – Language is used for communication: teaching a language involves enabling learners to interact socially in a variety of situations and contexts. This is optimally achieved through the unification of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- 2 – Learners’ needs and abilities must be taken into consideration.
- 3 – Learners have different individual learning styles.
- 4 – Learners should be involved in meaningful, interactive tasks for optimum effectiveness.

[Ministry of Education 2013, in Alqahtani (2019: 123)]

The benefits of English and English language teaching in Saudi Arabia are manifold. Beside the economic importance of this language, associated with the discourse of petroleum, Alshahrani underscores a political benefit as English enables the kingdom to communicate with the world at large and play a key role in the foreign policy domain. From a religious point of view, English is the language used to communicate with millions of foreign pilgrims who, every year, visit Mecca and Medina, two holy places in Islam. Furthermore, the English language enables to teach the values of Islam to non-Arabic-speaking people.

From a social perspective, Alrashidi and Phan highlight that the English language has enabled not only a rapid spread of technology in Saudi Arabia, but also the emergence of an increasingly globalized society. Indeed, with technology in general, and social media in particular, the Saudi society communicates with people across geographical borders (Alshahrani 2016).

This brief overview gives a hint at the teaching and learning of English in the Saudi Arabian context.

II – Statement of the Problem

Technology has steadily risen to become a critical tool in secondary education (Prasad *et al.* 2015). The powerful and penetrating global influence of technology has not left stranded the educational arena, deeply and significantly weighing on education, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Notwithstanding all the potential benefits technology embodies for education, some teachers are still grappling with difficulties in their classroom practice whereas others



are not ready to leave their comfort zone, namely traditional methods of delivering instruction.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is endowed with the capacity of bridging the gap between school experience and work practice; the ability of connecting the school and the external world, notably through the way it engages students in learning. ICT can definitely bring about transformative changes in education. Furthermore, the introduction of ICT in the realm of education is a must in this modern age, labelled the age of information. The introduction of ICT in education is all the more relevant as it provides teachers and students with significant opportunities to work progressively in today's information age.

The notion of illiteracy has undergone a semantic shift, as it is no longer restricted to people who can neither read nor write. The pervasiveness of technology in today's world and its impact on everyday life are known to each and every member of modern society and, therefore, need no further elaboration. New notions such as "computer literacy", "electronic literacy", "information literacy" (Tafazoli *et al.* 2018: 36) and "digital literacies" (Ekoç 2014: 19) have emerged in echo to the rapid growth of technology.

Son, Robb and Charismiadjji define computer literacy, in general, as "as the ability to use computers at an adequate level for creation, communication and collaboration in a literate society". Focusing on the specific realm of education, they restrict the definition of computer literacy to "the development of knowledge and skills for using general computer applications, language-specific software programs and Internet tools confidently and competently" (Tafazoli *et al.* 2018: 37). Following the ever-growing development of technology in the 21st century and its use in all areas of life, English language teaching in higher education in Saudi Arabia is keeping up the pace, as university and college instructors use various technological tools in the language classroom². What about secondary education in Saudi Arabia? The paper examines this very issue. Investigation on the extent to which high school teachers of English in Saudi Arabia use technological tools in their classrooms as an innovative teaching practice needs to be addressed. In this paper, the word technology is taken in its broadest sense; it refers to computers, tablets – such as iPad –, mobile phones devices, social media applications, video-sharing platforms, to name but these.

III – Statement of Purpose and Significance of the Study

Following the above stated problem subsequent to the overview of ELT in Saudi Arabia, the section below states the purpose the study and specifies its significance.

3.1 – Statement of Purpose

The following paper investigates the extent to which Saudi students learn English through technological devices in high schools. The study does not advocate at all the rejection of textbooks as classical pedagogical materials; instead, it raises awareness about the importance of installing pedagogical variety in the English class by resorting, at times, to technological tools so as to make the most of the modern aspects of the world in which the students live. While encouraging collaborative learning, this can be a source of motivation for the students, as they all have social media accounts, mobile devices, computers, etc. To carry out the study, the researchers have randomly chosen *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, located in Sharurah, Najran Province, Saudi Arabia, where they both reside.

The paper also comes up with models of communicative activities from which high school teachers of English in Saudi Arabia can seek inspiration. In so doing, the study is in line with Zhang's aim, that is to say, to come up with refreshing ideas and inspirations along the journey of developing language proficiency in the modern hi-tech era (Zhang 2016).

3.2 – Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies primarily in its diagnostic and problem-solving perspective, as it seeks to explore whether or not there is a discrepancy between the teaching approaches in high schools and the widespread use of technology in Saudi Arabia. The study also raises the Saudi English teachers' awareness of the need to conform to the requirements of the time by counterbalancing the traditional teaching methods with innovative ones based on the use of technology as a pedagogical tool, whatever the form it takes. Whether it is through the form of language learning software programs, social media applications, video-sharing platforms, computer-assisted didactic activities, mobile-based language learning, audio podcasts, etc., incorporating technology into the learning and teaching strategies is an efficient way to enhance student motivation.

After Hymes (1966, 1972) propounded the notion of communicative competence, various linguists revised it, adapted it and came up with new models. Following the successive models of communicative competence developed by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Savignon (1983), Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995), Bachman and Palmer (1996), Celce-Murcia (2007) devised a new model of communicative competence made up of six components, among which stands out "interactional competence". The component *interactional competence* refers to the knowledge of how to perform speech acts,



turn-taking in conversation, non-verbal signals, and so on. Digital technologies, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), social media applications, etc., are undoubtedly a godsend to build interactional competence, as they are made not only for communication, but also for interaction. Furthermore, they constitute an effective framework for ensuring both authenticity and real-life context, two prominent factors at the core of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

IV – Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

The notion of technology is used in this paper in a broad sense, and various studies have been conducted on its use in ELT.

4.1 – Conceptual Framework

The term "technology" covers a wide range of devices, aspects and perspectives. The notion of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), also known as Computer-Aided Language Instruction (CALI), stems from the introduction of computers in the realm of education. The ultimate goal of CALL is not the use of various technological tools and programs in the classroom, but rather the facilitation of language learning by providing a suitable setting (Tafazoli *et al.* 2018). Despite the centrality of the word "computer" in the nomenclature CALL, the notion includes any applications of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to foreign language teaching and learning (Tafazoli *et al.* 2018: 37-38). The convenience of CALL partly lies in the fact that time and place are not constraints for learning, in so far as instruction does not require any specific time, nor any particular place (AbuSeileek and Abu Sa'aleek 2012). Among the criticisms levelled at CALL, Armstrong and Yetter-Vassot mention that grammar exercises that merely consist in filling in blanks do not really help to develop the learners' ability to produce grammatically appropriate utterances in the target language (Armstrong and Yetter-Vassot 1994). Interactive videos and programs are trying to bridge this gap by providing more authentic and task-based activities (Singhal 1997).

The field of education has also opened its doors to smart phones, thus giving birth to the notion of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which refers to the use of a handheld mobile device as a tool for assisting language learning. Chen (2013) devoted an entire study to the attitude of Chinese students regarding tablet-based learning, which is another aspect of MALL.



The notion of "social media" refers to a number of social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Foursquare and Myspace, in addition to video sharing sites like YouTube (Ekoç 2014). Social media include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text), sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds (Tarantino *et al.* 2013). Lutkevich and Wigmore define "social media" as a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration³.

By their very nature, social media applications foster interaction and socialization. Ekoç (2014) sees in social media a useful tool for language learning, since they constitute a space for building interactional and interpersonal skills through the sharing and negotiation of knowledge. The social media application WhatsApp, for instance, refers to a popular mobile application, compatible with both iOS and Android operating systems, for exchanging both text and multimedia (photo, video, audio) messages. With internet connectivity, WhatsApp enables both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration among individual or groups of users (Bataineh *et al.* 2018). As for Instagram, it is a social media application that supports audios, images and videos. Mainly, users "Comment" on or "Like" pictures or videos that have been posted by other users. The application also has a direct messaging ("DM") feature where users can privately send messages to one another (Aloraini 2018).

The Internet holds a great potential for both foreign and second language education. It offers numerous benefits to the language learner (Singhal 1997). Among the possibilities the Internet offers, one can mention e-mails, which allow language learners to interact with native speakers. Through e-mails, learners have the possibility to use language in an authentic setting. The Internet also enables the acquisition of information from language resources for a variety of purposes. With the Internet, students can have access to web versions of daily newspapers and news reports. They can also have access to various types of information about the country of the target language: cultural, social, political, geographical, historical, etc. (Singhal 1997).

Through the Internet, chat rooms can be used as a learning environment. Learning through the Internet presents a great deal of benefits, even though it also presents a set of drawbacks among which stand out lack of financial resources to equip schools with technological infrastructures, uneasy access to information when the network is busy, exposure to inappropriate content, etc. (Singhal 1997).



4.2 – Literature Review

Various studies on the use of technology for language learning and teaching have specifically been carried out in Saudi Arabia, and more generally in the rest of the world. Moskovsky (2019) dealt with a review of 25 years of research on EFL in Saudi Arabia. His review shows that extensive research has been carried out on the use of ICT for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, ignited by the ever-increasing roles that the new digital media play in practically all professional and social domains (Moskovsky 2019). Most of the research papers published on the issue have taken a positive stance regarding the use of ICT as a pedagogical tool and underscored its benefits for learners.

The review conducted by Moskovsky (2019) highlights that Almudibry (2012) undertook a comparative study on vocabulary learning. He used two groups: an experimental group, which received vocabulary instruction via Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and a control group, which received standard vocabulary instruction. The findings concluded that the experimental group achieved better scores on the post-test and showed more frequent use of word-solving strategies. Alshwairkh (2004) came up with the finding that extensive directed reading on the Internet develops EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge (Moskovsky 2019).

Alotaibi (2009, 2010) conducted a research in which he concluded that the use of computers in EFL reading classes substantially improves learner performance. Carrying out research on the reading skill, Alshumaimeri and Almasri (2012) found that EFL learners who used WebQuests were able to develop better reading skills than those who did not. Al Fadda and Al Qasim (2013) investigated the capacity of podcasting to improve the listening comprehension skill of learners (Moskovsky 2019). As underscored in Moskovsky's review of 25 years of research on EFL in Saudi Arabia, literature on the use of ICT for EFL instruction is practically unanimous that EFL teachers generally have very positive attitudes towards ICT.

Aloraini (2018) conducted a study on the use of Instagram as an EFL learning tool in Saudi Arabia. The investigation reveals that Saudi students use Instagram frequently for learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Instagram is a social media application that does not constrain the posts or comments to a limited number of characters as Twitter does. The EFL posts found on Instagram address different language features such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation lessons. This offers an opportunity to compare the learners'

output amount, in addition to the types and amount of feedback the learners receive on this platform. Aloraini stresses that the number of EFL Instagram accounts dedicated to the Saudi population is increasing, and most of these accounts are created and managed by experienced learners, not certified teachers. Therefore, exploring Instagram as a teaching and learning tool would be a valuable strategy.

Pujiati, Zahra and Tamela (2019), in turn, tackled the issue of the use of Instagram as a way of increasing the motivation of students and developing their communicative competence in English. They noticed that there is a limited number of studies about Instagram in English lessons at schools. Conducting their study in an Indonesian school in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, they came to the conclusion that Instagram succeeded in motivating the students to learn English and improving their proficiency in English.

Studies have also been carried out in environments other than the Saudi context. Bataineh, Al-Hamad and Al-Jamal (2018) carried out a gender-based study on the potential utility of WhatsApp in EFL writing among Jordanian eleventh-grade students. They divided the students into two groups, one male and one female. Their findings show that WhatsApp is a potential catalyst for writing performance across gender, more so for the female students than for their male counterparts. The use of mobile devices in the English language classroom unlock many learning opportunities for both male and female learners. However, the researchers warn that, notwithstanding the advantages of mobile technologies, their role in the language classroom should not be overstated. Indeed, albeit a catalyst for innovative pedagogy, technology is not a fix-it-all for all learning dilemmas and in all learning contexts (Bataineh *et al.* 2018).

Bani Hani (2014) conducted a study on the barriers and benefits of computer-assisted language learning and teaching in Jordan. Among the significant barriers identified, stand out the lack of computers, technical problems, the need for more teacher training, the need for more time, and high cost. It comes out from the findings of the study the following list, which specifies the most essential benefits of computer-assisted language learning and teaching in Jordan: giving immediate feedback, motivating students, exciting and fun learning experience, initiating more interaction, and easier control of learning. To help raise the barriers, the researchers also made some recommendations.

Prasad, Lalitha and Srikar (2015) investigated teachers' perceptions of barriers to using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in secondary schools in India. Their



investigation attempted to bridge the gap between the development of ICT in the education sector and the insufficiency of the studies addressing the introduction of ICT in secondary schools in India. The researchers analyzed the factors that constitute barriers to the use of ICT in secondary education in India, and the findings pinpoint a set of lacks constituting the most crucial barriers to the implementation of ICT in secondary schools: lack of funding, lack of ICT integration and lack of connectivity. On the other hand, teachers' computer skills and computer experience, time spent on computers, domestic internet connection and computer ownership have an impact on barrier factors (Prasad *et al.* 2015).

The researchers called for more institutional awareness of the significance of ICT in education, specifically from the government and school managers. They extended their recommendations to all educational actors whose awareness of the impact of ICT on the development of the students' skills would contribute to overcoming the barriers hindering the use of technology in secondary schools. This would undeniably place the students in a position to benefit effectively from computer use (Prasad *et al.* 2015).

Ekoç studied the various features that make social media a unique environment to contribute efficiently to the sense of class community and collaboration outside the classroom. In the traditional classroom, time and place are constraints since communication requires the presence of both teachers and students. This is not necessarily the case with Facebook, where the actors can meet "in their territory" (Ekoç 2014: 18). Social media communication provides learners with opportunities to receive input and produce output while engaging in the negotiation of meaning. Teachers can initiate class group pages on the social media, providing opportunities for practice and communication in a context devoid of any traditional pedagogical concerns associated with a typical classroom. This can be achieved through social media, Facebook group pages, to take but this example (Ekoç 2014). It turns out that the advantages of setting a class group page on the social media far outweigh the disadvantages. In her study, Ekoç concluded that social media create interactional and interpersonal spaces where knowledge is shared and negotiated. Furthermore, students appreciate connecting themselves to their class community outside the walls of the language classroom, which strengthens interactions with their peers and instructors as well as commitment to learning (Ekoç 2014).

Tarantino, McDonough and Hua (2013) conducted a documentary research on the relationships between student engagement with social media and student learning, discussing the effects of the former on the latter. They also made some recommendations destined to

educators regarding the incorporation of social media in course content. In their documentary research, they specified the notion of social media as including a variety of web-based tools and services designed to promote community development through collaboration and information sharing.

Borau, Ullrich, Feng and Shen (2009) showed their concern with the way microblogging could be effectively used for developing communicative as well as cultural competence among Chinese learners of English as a foreign language. They explored the way the social media application known as Twitter was used in an EFL classroom at the Shanghai Jiao Tong Distance College. Most learners of English merely need a chance to actively produce language and the chance to use English as tool of communication. This calls for instructional methods and tools promoting "active" learning and providing students with opportunities to express themselves and interact in the target language. Social media provide such opportunities, and Twitter is one of them.

V – Methodology: Research Instrument and Procedures

It should be borne in mind that this research paper is a case study conducted in Sharurah, Najran Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is carried out among secondary school students learning English. A high school in Sharurah known as *Imam Al-Zahabi High School* has been chosen randomly to host the study, and the sampling took place on Thursday, March 31, 2022 at 11 AM. Coming to the methodology proper, the researchers have adopted a descriptive method and a quantitative approach to carry out their study.

5.1 – Research Instrument

The researchers have used a paper-based questionnaire as a quantitative research instrument for their study. It is a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to investigate the extent to which technology is used as a pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning of English in secondary education in Saudi Arabia as well as the students' opinions about the introduction of technology in the English language class. The questionnaire was addressed to students from the randomly chosen *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, Sharurah, Najran Province, Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire contained 10 questions altogether. The first question is about the frequency at which their English teachers use technology as a pedagogical tool in the English language classroom, more precisely the

frequency. The students had to answer by ticking one of the following: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Usually, or Always*.

For the 9 remaining questions, the students had to choose one of the following answers: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree*. The questions are about the impact of the use of technology on the students' attitude, interaction, skills and levels. They are also about the role of technology in the acquisition of knowledge about the native speakers' culture. The students are also asked to express their opinions about alternating traditional textbooks and technology in the classroom as well as technology's capacity of creating fun during instruction.

5.2 – Research Procedures

In Saudi Arabia, high school is made up of three levels: Grade 10 (1st year), Grade 11 (2nd year) and Grade 12 (3rd year). Of the 60 students initially targeted to participate in the study, only 48 students finally answered the questionnaire, thus constituting the sample size of the study population. Chosen randomly, the 48 students come from all the three levels of high school. The researchers have statistically analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaire and presented them in tables and diagrams.

It is worth pointing out that the study presents a few limitations. As a matter of fact, the investigation was carried out in only one randomly chosen high school, namely *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, Sharurah, Najran Province, Saudi Arabia. Notwithstanding the fact that all grades of high school were targeted, only 48 students were involved. The findings of the paper, therefore, suffer from limitations, as they just provide a tendency or an indication, which could not be generalized throughout the entire Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

VI – Data Analysis and Recommendations

The questionnaire opens on a factual question about the English teachers' use of technology as a tool for instruction, the term technology being taken here in its broadest sense. Then, ensues a set of nine questions that can be labelled *opinion-based questions* or else *attitude questions*, because they have been designed to measure the directions of opinion among the students. The data collected through the questionnaire are analyzed below.

A – Factual Question: Your English teacher uses technology (computers, mobile phones, applications, videos, social media, etc.) as a pedagogical tool during the English class time.



The questionnaire was addressed to 48 students at *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, Sharurah. Among the 48 students, 26 come from the first level of high school, or Grade 10. The 22 other students belong to the second and third levels of high school, corresponding respectively to Grade 11 and Grade 12.

Table 1 below presents the data collected from Grade 10; Table 2 the data obtained from Grades 11 and 12, and Table 3 the cumulative data obtained from the three grades: Grades 10, 11 and 12.

Table 1: Grade 10

Question	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Always</i>
Your English teacher uses technology (computers, mobile phones, applications, videos, social media, etc.) as a pedagogical tool during the English class time.	0	0	2	4	20

Table 2: Grades 11 and 12

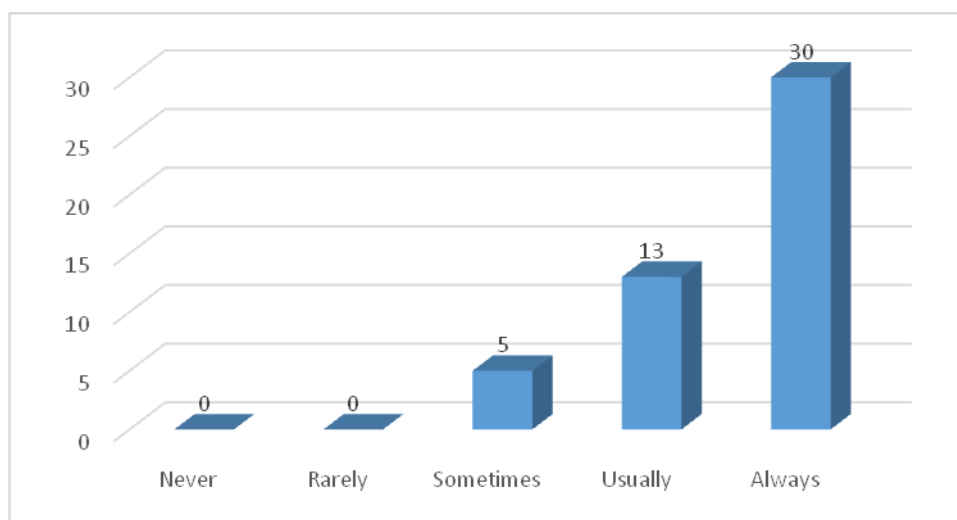
Question	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Always</i>
Your English teacher uses technology (computers, mobile phones, applications, videos, social media, etc.) as a pedagogical tool during the English class time.	0	0	3	9	10

Table 1 indicates that as early as the first year of high school, English teachers use technology in their pedagogical practice on a regular basis. This regular use continues as students reach the upper grades – Grades 11 and 12.

Table 3: Cumulative Table

Question	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Always</i>
Your English teacher uses technology (computers, mobile phones, applications, videos, social media, etc.) as a pedagogical tool during the English class time.	0	0	5	13	30

Diagram A: Bar Graph Representing the Responses to the Factual Question



It turns out that 30 of the students consider that the English teacher *always* uses technology to teach them English, which corresponds to a percentage of 62.5%; 13 students (about 27.08%) say that the teacher *usually* teaches them English through technology, and 5 students (about 10.41%) say that the teacher *sometimes* uses technology. None of the 48 students ticked the options *Never* and *Rarely*. The students' answers absolutely prove their teachers' current use of technology as a pedagogical tool at *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*.

B – Opinion-Based Questions

A set of nine questions (1-9) were asked to the students to collect their opinions about the use of technology in the teaching and learning of English.

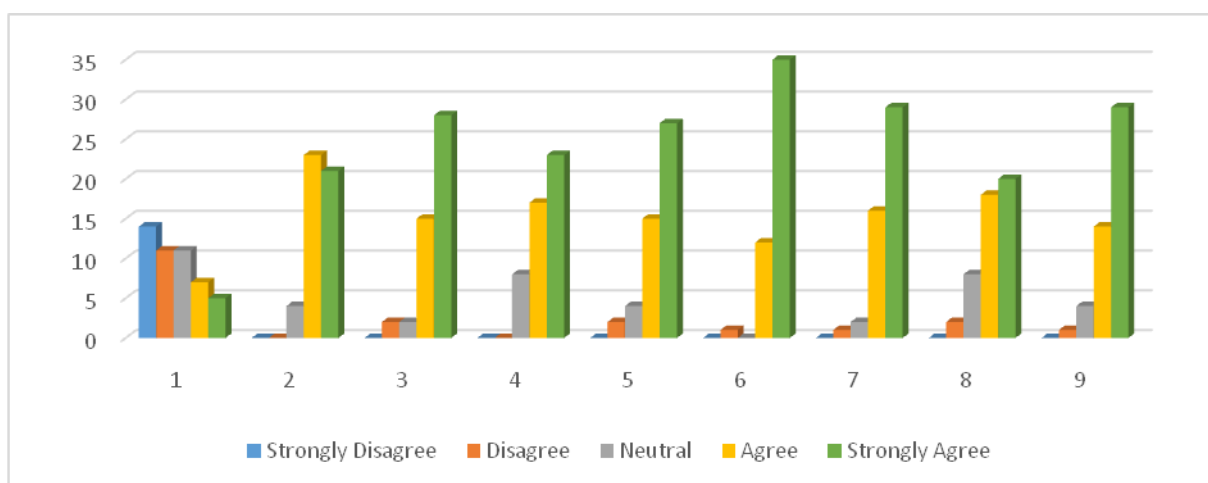
It is worth specifying that one of the students did not answer Question n°3; he did not tick any of the five options: *Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neutral*, *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*. For this reason, the cumulative score for this question is 47 and not 48, the total number of students.

Table 4

Questions	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1. Students prefer to learn English at school through textbooks only.	14	11	11	7	5
2. The use of technology in the English classroom encourages interaction between students.	0	0	4	23	21
3. Learning English through classroom activities based on technology is more fun, more interesting and more enjoyable than learning with textbooks.	0	2	2	15	28
4. In addition to textbooks, students want their English teacher to use technology as a teaching tool in the classroom.	0	0	8	17	23
5. The use of videos during the English class is for the students a good way of learning about	0	2	4	15	27

the native speakers' culture.					
6. The use of videos during the English class develops the students' listening and speaking skills.	0	1	0	12	35
7. The use of computers, mobile phones, iPads, videos, TV sets, the Internet and web-based programmes can help students develop their levels in English.	0	1	2	16	29
8. Students can improve their levels in English with social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat, etc.	0	2	8	18	20
9. The use of technology in the English classroom increases the students' motivation.	0	1	4	14	29

Diagram B: Bar Graph Representing the Responses to the Opinion-Based Questions



More than half of the sample population reject English classes entirely based on textbooks, as 14 among them *strongly disagree* whereas 11 simply *disagree*. This corresponds to an overall rate of disagreement equal to 52.08%. This rate is twice as high as the overall rate of agreement, which is equal to 25% since 7 students *agree* and 5 *strongly agree*. It is worth noting the high number of indecisive students – 11 altogether – which is almost equal to the number of students who agree.

Almost all the students of the sample population acknowledge the encouraging impact of technology on student-student interaction in the English classroom, which corresponds to an overall rate of agreement equal to 91.66%, resulting from the 23 students who *agree* and the 21 who *strongly agree*. None of the students (0%) disagrees.

Only 2 students disagree on the point that technology-based classroom activities make learning English more fun, more interesting and more enjoyable than learning with textbooks. Likewise, only 2 students show total neutrality regarding the same point. All the rest of the



sample population share the point raised, with 28 students who *strongly agree* and 15 who *agree*. One of the students did not answer this question.

The total number of students who express their preference for a balanced teaching method, alternating textbooks and technological tools, is equal to 40, as 17 *agree* and 23 *strongly agree*. The resulting overall rate of agreement is then equal to 83.33%. No student whatsoever disagrees with this point, whereas 8 students have no opinion at all.

The use of videos as a pedagogical tool is highly appreciated among the students as 42 among them (87.5%) consider it a good way of learning about native speakers' culture, 27 students have expressed a strong agreement on this point. It should also be mentioned that 4 students are *neutral* whereas 2 students *disagree*. There is no strong disagreement regarding this point.

Of all the 48 students that constitute the sample population, only one student disagrees on this point. All the other 47 students (97.91%) deem that the use of videos largely contributes to the development of the speaking and listening skills.

The ability of computers, mobile phones, iPads, videos, TV sets, the Internet and web-based programmes to improve the students' levels in English is a widely shared opinion among the sample population. Indeed, 16 students *agree*, 29 *strongly agree*, which corresponds to an overall rate of agreement of 93.75%. Only one student disagrees while 2 students have no opinion about this point.

The improvement of the students' levels can also be achieved with the use of such social media applications as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat, etc., as 38 students (79.16%) share this point, with 18 students who *agree* and 20 students who *strongly agree*. No strong disagreement has been recorded; just 2 students simply *disagree* whereas 8 students are *neutral*.

Coming to the ninth and last point of the questionnaire, 29 students *strongly agree* that technology has an impact on the students' motivation and 14 students *agree*, which results in an overall rate of agreement equal to 89.58%. No student strongly disagrees, only one student disagrees, and 4 students have given a neutral response.

In the light of the data collected, then analyzed, a set of recommendations can be made. Saudi teachers of English from other secondary schools, both mid schools and high schools included, who never or rarely use technology as a pedagogical tool in their

classrooms, should follow the example of their colleagues from *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, or even go beyond if need be. This is all the more understandable as, on the one hand, more than 52.08% of the students do not subscribe at all to English classes exclusively based on the use of textbooks; and, on the other hand, 43 students out of 48 find in technology-based activities more fun, more interest and more enjoyment. For those reasons, and others stated below, English teachers should make the most of technology in the English language classroom. That does not mean at all that they must absolutely discard textbooks, given that 83.33% of the students speak in favor of the use of technology in supplement of the use of textbooks.

Two prominent assets of technology lie in the fact that it fosters interaction between students as well as motivation, which is in direct line with the pedagogical approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), among the main characteristics of which stands out learner-centredness. The important rates of agreement – 91.66% for interaction and 89.58% for motivation – unmistakably speak in favor of the introduction of technology in English language teaching and learning.

The authors highly recommend the use of videos in the teaching process because it is much appreciated by the students. Not only do they contribute to developing the students' awareness of English native speakers' culture, but they also develop the speaking and listening skills. Therefore, teachers should resort to video-based activities from time to time, particularly videos about native speakers.

It turns out that the great majority of the students deem that technology, taken in its broadest sense, can help improve their levels in English. For this reason, in addition to computers, mobile phones, iPads, videos, TV sets, the Internet and web-based programmes, English teachers should also fully exploit social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and so on. They should, therefore, explore the wide range of technological tools available and not stick to only one specific type of technology all the time.

VII – Technology-Based Communicative Activities

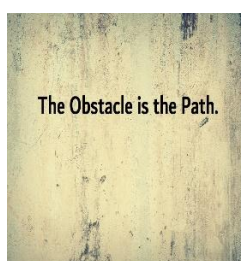
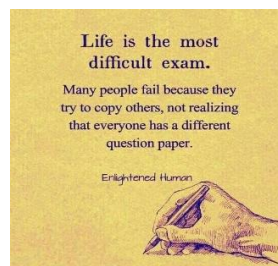
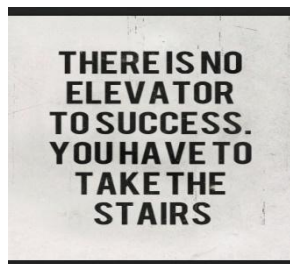
To help enhance the use of technology in English language instruction in secondary education, the following section comes up with a sample of models of technology-based communicative activities.

7.1 – Discussing Motivational and Inspirational Quotes on WhatsApp

The activities require a WhatsApp group for the English class. The teacher and the students are members of the WhatsApp group.

Activity 1: Individual Work

The teacher sends to the WhatsApp group a series of pictures⁴ conveying motivational and inspirational quotes.



Outside the classroom

- a – Each student reads all the motivational quotes and then selects his favourite one.
- b – Each student sends a vocal message in which he specifies the motivational quote he has chosen, then he gives the reason why he has chosen this specific quote.

Classroom Feedback

As a classroom activity, the teacher and the students review and discuss each vocal message sent; they then comment on the arguments and ideas developed by each sender. If need be, they ask for further explanations.

Activity 2: Group work

- Students form groups, for example: Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, etc.
- The activity starts with Group 1.

Outside the classroom

- a – The students of Group 1 discuss and propose a picture conveying a motivational quote they find interesting and send it to the WhatsApp group.



b – Just after sending the picture of the motivational quote, the students of Group 1 give the reasons why they have chosen this particular one. They comment on the life lesson that one can learn from the motivational quote. They relate the motivational quote to life experience, giving anecdotes if they have any.

c – The students of Group 2 and Group 3 consult the picture of the motivational quote proposed by Group 1 as well as the related audio messages. Then, they give their appreciation of the choice of Group 1 in terms of relevance, importance, and so on. After that, they ask questions through WhatsApp messages.

d – Group 1 answers the questions through WhatsApp.

Classroom Feedback

- In the classroom, Group 2 and Group 3 react to the answers. The teacher allows peers' comments and discussion. The teacher gives feedback.

- The same activity is conducted with Group 2. After the classroom feedback on Group 2, it is the turn of Group 3.

7.2 – Group Video Project Work

The teacher divides the students into three groups for instance – Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3. The number of groups as well as the size of the groups largely depend on the size of the class.

The teacher gives a list of topics for discussion.

1 – The impact of social media on Saudi teenagers.

2 – The high rate of accidents on the roads in Saudi Arabia.

3 – In Saudi Arabia, there are single-sex schools; in the USA, there are mixed-sex schools. Compare the two systems of schooling. Are there advantages and disadvantages in both systems?

4 – Technology can help improve education and communication skills.

5 – Discuss the importance of learning English.

6 – Are ambitions important in life? Is it good or bad to be overambitious in life?

- In each group, the students agree on the topic they would like to discuss.

- Students of each group meet for the Group Video Project Work. The day, time and place of meeting depend on their choice. They discuss the topic chosen and film the discussion.



- Each group produces a video of 15-20 minutes showing the discussion. They can use their smartphones or a conventional camera to film the discussion. The sound and image of the video must be of good quality.
- The teacher gives the students one week to do the Group Video Project Work.

Classroom Feedback

- One week is the time allotted to the students for the Group Video Project Work. The following week, the teacher organizes a feedback session in the classroom.
- With a video projector, the teacher projects in the classroom the videos produced by each group. The teacher and the students watch the video of Group 1 first. Then, the teacher opens a session for peers' comments on the video, the discussion, the ideas developed, the relevance of the arguments, and so on. The students can take the floor for further contributions.
- The teacher provides a wrap-up feedback on the work of Group 1.
- The teacher repeats the same procedures with the videos submitted by Group 2 and Group 3.

7.3 – The Cultural Encounter: Video Chat with a Native Speaker

The teacher organizes a video chat between the students and a native speaker on Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, Zoom, or on any other social media application, live video chat app or platform. The students ask the native speaker questions about aspects of his culture they would like to know more. In turn, they also answer the native speaker's questions about their own culture.

Conclusion

We live in a hyper-connected, fast-paced world, and things are not changing anytime soon (Wagers 2015). The ever-growing development of technology is evidenced by its use in all areas of life, which denotes its democratization in the 21st century. The irreversible development of technology has a strong impact on the field of education in general, and on English language teaching and learning in particular.

Wagers establishes a link between technological advances in today's world and language learning: "*As our world becomes more and more connected through technological advances, it becomes increasingly obvious that learning another language is beneficial for many reasons*" (Wagers 2015: 1). Wagers's assertion is all the more important as it allows to account for the relevance of learning English, a language reputed to be the language of science and technology, and whose international status needs no further elaboration.



As the use of technology is widespread in all sectors of life in Saudi Arabia, the study aimed at investigating the extent to which Saudi secondary school students learn English through technological tools. To explore the issue, we have randomly chosen a high school known as *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*, Sharurah, Najran Province, Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study, entirely based on a descriptive method and a quantitative approach, clearly establish a current use of technology in the English language classroom at *Imam Al-Zahabi High School*. In the light of this discovery, we have, on the one hand, concluded that the English teachers of *Imam Al-Zahabi High School* conform their teaching practice to the requirements of the modern time. On the other hand, we have come up with the recommendation that the English teachers of *Imam Al-Zahabi High School* should be taken as examples by their colleagues from other schools.

It also stems from the findings of the study that the majority of the students object to learning English at school exclusively through textbooks. In addition, the study unequivocally establishes that, for the other points investigated, the attitudes of the great majority of the students speak in favor of learning English through technology – computers, mobile phones, iPads, videos, TV sets, the Internet, web-based programmes, and social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat, etc. The findings of the study allow to posit that, from the motivation, fun and enjoyment it fosters in the English language classroom to the development of the students' levels and skills, through to the awareness and understanding of the native speakers' culture it helps to build, technology absolutely appears to be of benefit to all students.

Notes

* El Hadji Cheikh KANDJI is Professor of English Literature and ELT Inspector General. Rashid Hassan Taha MOHAMED is Assistant Professor of Linguistics.

** The high school is named after a great Imam, scholar on the history of Islam and Hadith expert of the Medieval Era born in Damascus and known as Shams ad-Din Al-Zahabi (1274-1348). In Arabic, his last name is written *الذهبي* whereas, in English, there are various spellings: Al-Zahabi (with a silent /l/), Az-Zahabi, Al-Dhahabi, and Adh-Dhahabi. He is nicknamed Imam Zahabi, or Imam Dhahabi.

1 – See *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*,

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media>, retrieved 05-06-2022.

2 – See the research conducted on this issue and discussed in the section Literature Review of this paper.



3 – See Ben Lutkevich and Ivy Wigmore, "What is Social Media?", 1-5.

[What is Social Media? \(techtargget.com\)](http://techtargget.com), retrieved 05-06-2022.

4 – The pictures of the motivational quotes are retrieved from the Internet.

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