

Modern Technology in a Language Classroom: An Exploratory Study

Senaïd Fejzić

Technical school
“Kemal Kapetanović”
Kakanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina
senaïdfejzic@yahoo.com

Aida Tarabar, PhD

Faculty of Engineering,
University of Zenica
Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina
aidatarabar@gmail.com

Abstract: *In the modern technology era it is necessary to find the best ways of utilizing its results and products for educational purposes, i.e. for enhancing teaching and learning processes. The paper presents a research conducted in the secondary schools of the Zenica-Doboj Canton. The aim of the research was to identify the extent to which these B&H schools use modern teaching aids in their foreign language classroom.*

Keywords: *modern technology, teaching aids, learning, effectiveness, motivation.*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, technology has become a defining factor of modern civilization. If we wish to define modern technology we can say that it is a set of tools and resources used to manage, communicate and store information. These tools and resources include computers and their programs, the Internet, broadcasting technologies and telephony. In other words, modern technology is present everywhere: in the tools that we use, in the products that we buy, in the cars that we drive, in the phones that we carry. According to David Graddol (1997), an eminent British linguist, technology is at the heart of the world globalization process affecting all aspect of life (such as: education, work and culture) and it presents the most significant drive of all changes in the world.

The improvement and accessibility of the technology has significantly changed the *educational* landscape in many aspects. Thus, modern technology teaching aids provide teachers and students with an easy access to information and enable the integration of teaching and learning processes.

GLOBAL GROWTH OF TECHNOLOGY USE IN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

As opposed to traditional teaching aids (blackboard, chalk, posters, charts, pictures etc.), modern teaching aids are examples of the use of modern technology in a classroom. They are of great help for teachers since they facilitate their teaching and save time. They are also very useful for students either for their work at home or in the class. Modern teaching aids in a language classroom include computers, laptops, interactive whiteboards (also called *smart boards*), the Internet and its online dictionaries, language laboratories, different software etc. These aids have many advantages over the traditional ones. They help teachers in attracting students' attention, encourage the classroom interaction by giving vividness to the learning situation (e.g. listening to a video clip on YouTube and discussing it afterwards), reinforce the spoken or written words with concrete images and thus facilitate the learning process. Using modern teaching aids makes teaching more economic and practical. Teachers can take all the materials home in their pocket, i.e. on a USB stick. Modern teaching aids help teachers to express their creativity, which enhances students' motivation.

However, there are some disadvantages to modern teaching aids. One of the drawbacks is the investment costs. The costs can be huge because such equipment needs to be maintained. Moreover, in the case of using software teaching aids, the software needs to be constantly upgraded. Another problem is a proper use of modern teaching aids. Not all teachers can grasp technology very quickly. As the hardware and software industry develops quickly, there is a need of constantly training them to understand new developments. Sometimes, modern teaching aids make students inactive. The students have everything served in front of them. Their activities are often insufficient, and they do not

have to think much. However, this relates to students who are anyway prone to inactivity.

The aforementioned advantages of modern teaching aids led to a tremendous growth in their use in language instruction throughout the world. In recent years, modern technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. In other words, modern teaching aids facilitate teachers to improve their instruction and to adapt classroom activities and homework assignments to students' needs, thus enhancing the language learning experience.

The growth of technology use in language instruction is evident in countries all over the world but specifically in countries which are economically developed. Japan and the USA are pioneers when it comes to implementing modern technology in language instruction.

All European Union countries have invested huge funds in equipping their schools with modern teaching aids including web connectivity and information technology (IT) professional development. Furthermore, the European Union has also set targets for enhancing teachers' and students' digital literacy and skills (European Commission, 2006).

Outside the EU, the situation seems to be the same. According to the Statistics of the American National Center for Education, compiled in 2009, some 97 percent of teachers had one or more computers located in their classrooms (Gray et al., 2010). Across East Asia, enthusiasm for the use of new information and communication technology (ICT) in education is undeniable and widespread. South Korea is already implementing plans to completely replace physical textbooks with digital ones (Trucano, 2011). When it comes to Latin America, according to a study investigating the relation between technology and English language teaching in that part of the world, the language teachers have very good access to computers, Internet and other digital technologies. Apart from computers and the Internet, the Latin American teachers frequently use CD and DVD players. The teachers also reported that most of their students frequently use computers and Internet-based resources for their studying at home (Ren et al., 2009). As far as Africa is concerned, there are reports that the use of ICT in African countries is generally increasing in spite of the limited financial means for their procurement (Tella et al., 2007).

Against this backdrop of international trends, the question arises what the situation is like in Bosnia and Herzegovina when it comes to the use of modern teaching aids in English language teaching.

MODERN TEACHING AIDS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM – A STUDY

The situation with modern technologies, i.e. with modern teaching aids, in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not favorable for many reasons. One of them is the fact that the country is still recovering from the war when many school buildings and educational facilities were damaged or destroyed. Another reason is the lack

of funds. Therefore, most of the schools are still not well equipped. In this respect, the International Community has made a significant contribution and over the last two decades many schools have been supplied with TVs, CD players, computers, video projectors and Smart Boards. However, some of the listed aids are still not in a wider use.

It is difficult to say which are the most commonly used teaching aids in our schools and to determine to what extent they are being used because no real study or research in that respect has been conducted so far. In order to identify types of modern teaching aids in Bosnian schools and the extent of their use in foreign language classroom, a small exploratory study was conducted in the form of a questionnaire.¹

Participants and instrument

The participants in the study were students and teachers from five secondary schools in the Zenica-Doboj Canton: *Muhsin Rizvic* Grammar School in Kakanj, Technical School in Zenica, *KSC Sveti Pavao* Grammar School in Zenica, Vocational School in Visoko and *Osman ef. Redzovic* Madrasah in Visoko. The questionnaire involved 121 students and their teachers of English. The students and the teachers were given two different questionnaires and they were instructed how to fill them in.

We cannot claim that the questionnaire provides results representative for the whole country. However, the range of different schools, towns and a number of participants provides a sample that can be considered relevant for the study.

RESULTS

Teachers' questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire was made up of five questions. The first question was "*Are you satisfied with the selection of modern teaching aids in your school?*" The answers to this question revealed that the majority or 72 percent of the teachers were partially satisfied with the selection of modern teaching aids in their schools. 18 percent of the teachers were completely satisfied and 9 percent of them were dissatisfied (Figure 1).

¹ The study was a part of a wider research project designed to determine the effectiveness of English classes using modern teaching aids in comparison to the traditionally delivered ones.

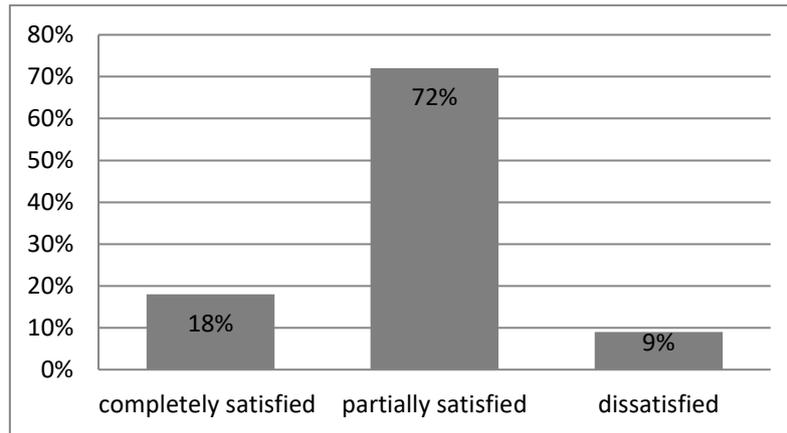


Figure 1. *Are you satisfied with the selection of modern teaching aids in your school?*

In the second question the teachers were asked if they were happy to use modern teaching aids in their teaching. 90 percent of the teachers agreed that they were happy to use modern teaching aids in their classes (Figure 2).

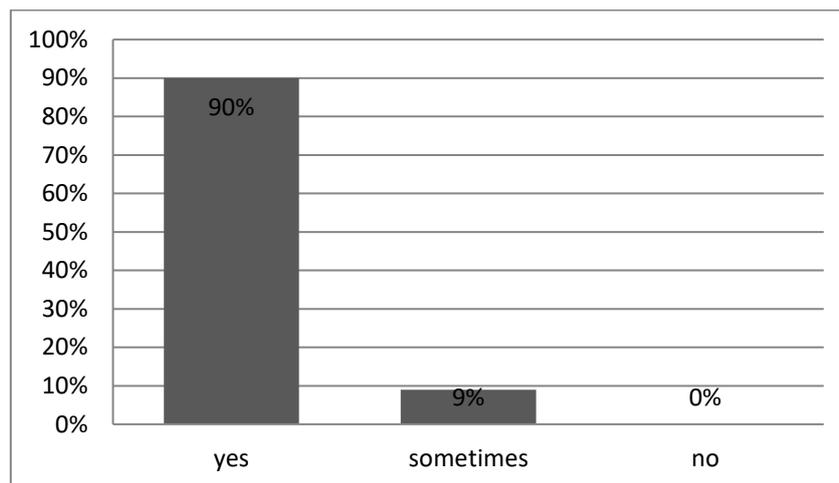


Figure 2. *Are you happy to use modern teaching aids in your teaching?*

The third question was related to the frequency of use of modern teaching aids when teaching. The results showed that 9 percent of the teachers almost never used modern teaching in their teaching, 36 percent of the teachers used them only occasionally and 54 percent of the teachers relied on modern teaching aids in most lessons. However, none of the teachers used them in every lesson (Figure 3).

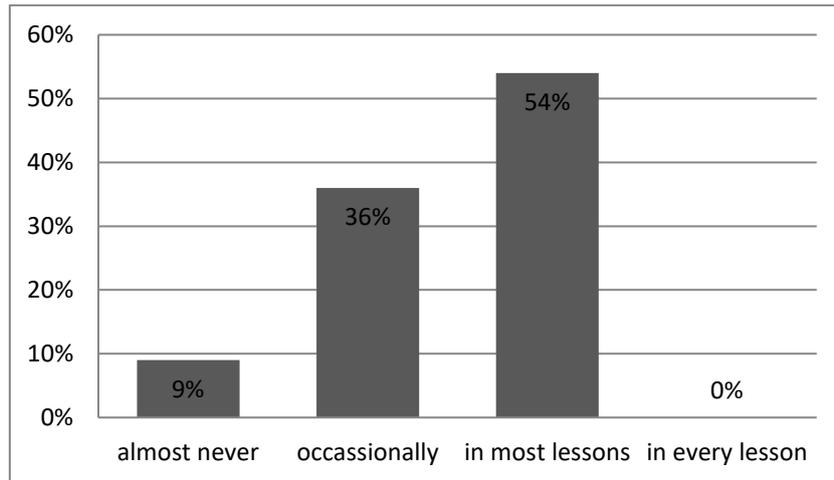


Figure 3. *How often do you use modern teaching aids in your teaching?*

In the fourth question the teachers were asked about the effectiveness of modern teaching aids. 91 percent of the teachers agreed that modern teaching aids are very effective as a way of teaching and only 9 percent of them considered them to be moderately effective (Figure 4).

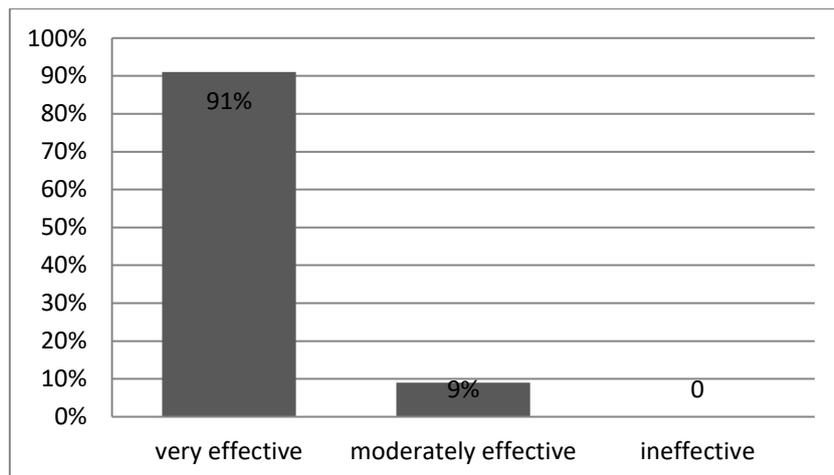


Figure 4. *How effective is the use of modern teaching aids as a way of teaching?*

In the final question the teachers were asked how interesting/motivating the use of modern teaching aids was for the students. The answers revealed that 72 percent of the teachers believed that modern teaching aids are very interesting/motivating. 18 percent of the teachers considered modern teaching aids to be extremely interesting/motivating and 9 percent considered them not to be very interesting/motivating for their students (Figure 5).

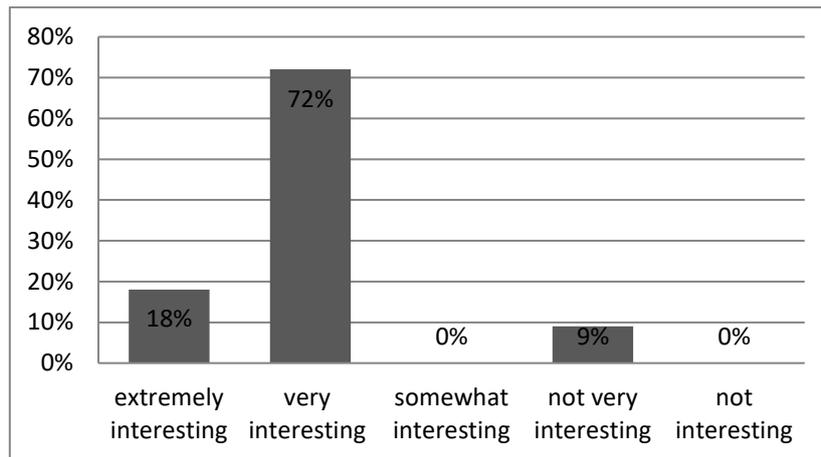


Figure 5. How interesting/motivating is the use of modern teaching aids for the students?

Students' questionnaire

The students' questionnaire was made up of three questions related to the use of modern teaching aids in their English classes. The first question was "How often does your English teacher use modern teaching aids when teaching?". 50 percent of the students responded that their teachers used modern teaching aids in most lessons. The least number of students responded that their teachers used modern teaching aids in every lesson (Figure 6).

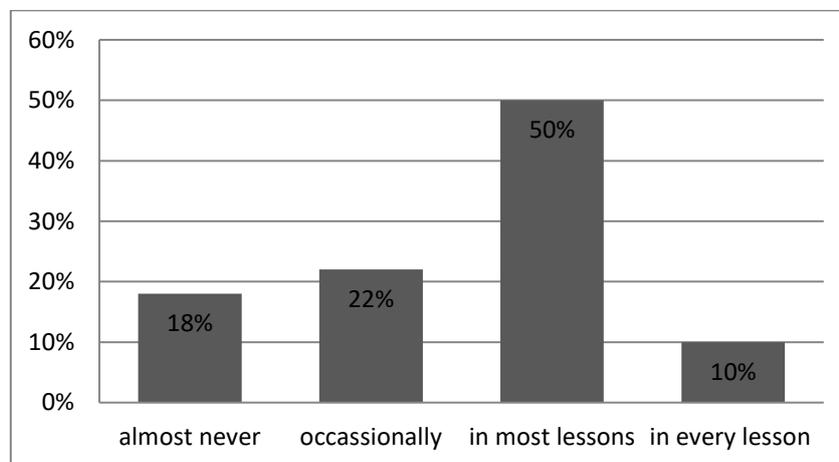


Figure 6. How often does your English teacher use modern teaching aids when teaching?

In the second question the students were asked if modern teaching aids made their classes more interesting. 92 percent of the students responded that their classes were more interesting with modern teaching aids. Only 5 percent of them believed that the modern teaching aids made no difference in their classes, whereas 3 percent of the students thought that the classes where modern teaching aids were used were less interesting than traditionally delivered ones (Figure 7).

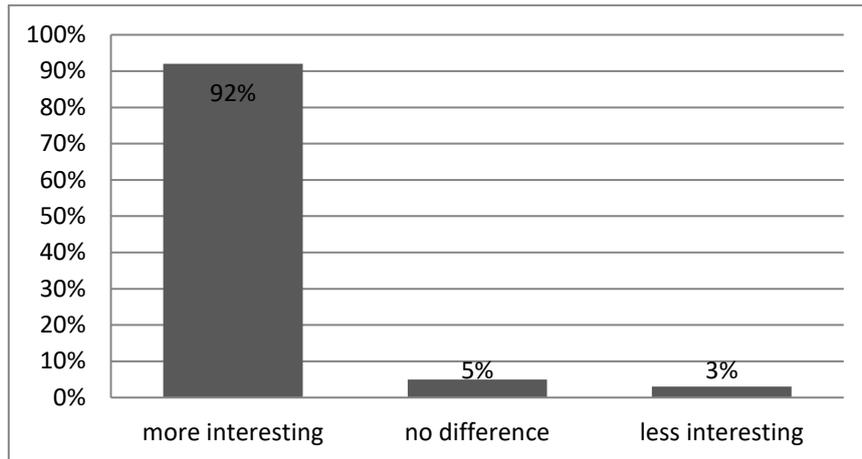


Figure 7. Do modern teaching aids make your classes more interesting?

In the third part of the questionnaire the students were asked to mark the most frequently used teaching aids in their English classroom. Their responses revealed that the most frequently used modern teaching aids in their classes were computers and projectors² (Figure 8).

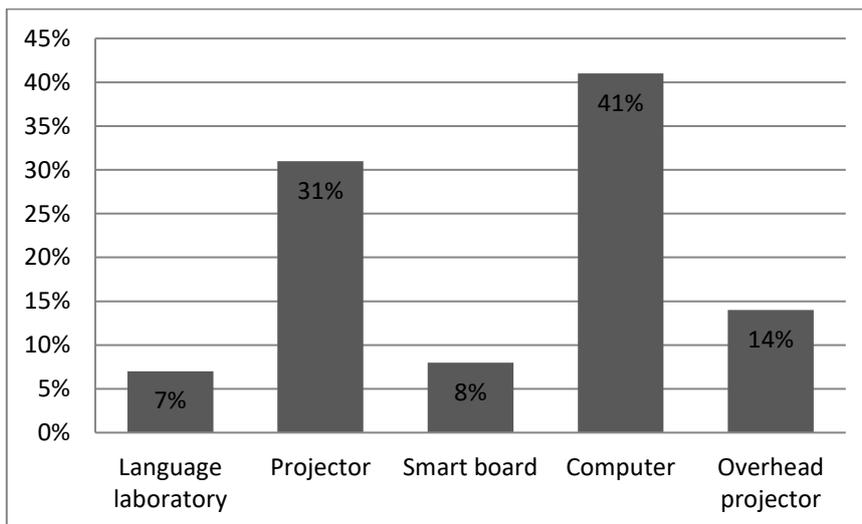


Figure 8. The most frequently used teaching aids in English classroom

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The responses from the teachers' questionnaire revealed that the teachers consider modern teaching aids to be very effective for their language teaching and very interesting/motivating for their students. Consequently, they are happy to use such aids in most of their classes. However, they are only partially satisfied with the selection of modern teaching aids in their schools. The reason

² The computer and the projector were listed separately in the questionnaire because of the fact that many schools use computers without projectors as a replacement for the CD player. Projectors cannot be used without computers so whenever students selected the projector in the questionnaire that also involved the computer.

for this can be found in already mentioned fact that the B&H budgetary funds allocated for the development of modern technology aided instruction in language classes are still insufficient. In addition, the random comments that teachers made during the study showed that teachers are usually not even consulted by school management in terms of their preferences as to which teaching aids they find the most useful.

The comparison of results proved that students' responses are completely in line with the ones provided by their teachers. They confirmed that teachers use modern teaching aids in most lessons. Students also encourage the use of modern teaching aids (not only computers, which they find the most frequently used teaching aid) in their language classroom and they do believe (92 percent of students) that modern teaching aids make their classes more interesting and motivating.

Therefore, it can be concluded that equal attitudes on both sides send a clear message that modern teaching aids should be more extensively used in the B&H language classroom, a wider range of such aids should be introduced in language instruction and more funds should be allocated not only for the procurement of such aids but also for raising teachers techno literacy (seminars, workshops, webinars).

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