

## The Use of ICT in Search of Quality of Teaching at the University

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### Abstract

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) gives another vision of language learning and provides learners a certain pleasure to deal with these languages. The current work aims at shedding light on the existing link between the use of ICT and the improvement of the quality of teaching languages at the university. We will articulate our research around the following questions: what are the implications of using ICT in the process of teaching/learning foreign languages? Does ICT provide more independence for the learner? As a hypothesis, we propose the following: ICT sharpens learners' willingness and desire to learn while facilitating their access to language and culture. It installs them in a report of independence thus favoring the acquisition of the skills. To report on this problem, we will rely on a survey conducted within the Center of Intensive Language Teaching of the University of Biskra, Algeria. We used a questionnaire, as a mean of investigation. We subjected our corpus to a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative interpretative analysis.

*Keywords:* Algerian context, ICT, languages, quality, teaching

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## Introduction

Conventional means oppose technological or modern means, in the field of education as in all other areas of life. The ultimate goal of the human being is to perfect his environment to make it as conducive as possible. To palpate this reality, we need only to consider the evolution of man from the Ramapithecus to the Cro-Magnon, as a first step, and from the Cro-Magnon to the cybernetic man as a next step.

In Algeria, as everywhere in the world, learning foreign languages has become a necessity to evolve in a society that wants to be open to the world. The number of private foreign language schools is increasing. The activity of the CILT (Centers of Intensive Language Teaching) is reinforced by the use of teaching methods redesigned by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which sets itself the goal of introducing new concepts and methods for teaching foreign languages. The use of language labs, projection screens, data show, internet, podcasts and digital devices such as tablets, smartphones, gives another vision of language learning and gives learners a certain pleasure in learning.

Our paper will be articulated around the following problematic: What are the implications of using ICT in the process of teaching/learning foreign languages? Does the digital age provide more independence for the learner? As a hypothesis, we propose the following: ICT sharpen learners' willingness and desire to learn while facilitating their access to language and culture. It installs him in a report of independence thus favoring the acquisition of the skills.

To report on this problem, we will rely on a survey conducted within the Center of Intensive Teaching Languages of the University of Biskra, Algeria, with the learners. We used a questionnaire, as a mean of investigation. We have tried to collect information from a sample that will be as representative as possible. We subjected our corpus to a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative interpretative analysis.

Regarding the architecture of our paper we will, at first address the field of ICT, the benefits and limits of their use. Second, we will try to highlight the notion of quality through an investigation that we conducted as a part of our PhD thesis. Therefore, we chose to work on issues related to our problematic.

Our aim is to emphasize the importance of using ICT in order to achieve quality in the field of foreign language teaching / learning within the Intensive Language Learning Center of the University of Biskra, Algeria. The reason we chose a sample of learners from this center is that most of them are students who aspire to improve their level in foreign languages in order to ensure a certain quality in relation to the skills required in their fields.

## Elements Definitions

### *Information and Communication Technologies*

Nowadays, technology is everywhere; it has invaded even the personal and intimate space of individuals. This invasion can only have consequences at all levels and in all areas: social, economic and political ...etc. The University is also an area where the use of ICT has seen a

growing development. Not only teachers but also students use this method to improve high quality teaching / learning, both in terms of performance and skills.

Crawford (2013) explains the importance of the ICT as a mean of teaching. He argues that it is a powerful tool as it improves people's abilities, and that it is particularly effective as a learning tool. According to the same author, when people learn how to use ICT, they interact with this tool and learn dynamically. Using ICT in teaching makes it easier and more attractive for the students. "One of the hallmarks of using ICTs for language teaching and learning is that it allows learners to work independently" (Foucher, 2008, p. 53)

In a study entitled "*What place for ICT in class of FFL? The time of balance sheets*", Defays & Mattioli-Thonard (2012), deal with the different aspects of the use of ICT in the teaching of the French language. One of these aspects concerns the teaching practices induced by ICT, on different levels: mental, intellectual, cultural, professional, which condition the construction of knowledge.

In the context of our paper, we discuss, among other things, the benefits and risks of using ICT, and their use in teaching / learning foreign languages, including French. We can possibly mention among the advantages, the enrichment, the independence, and the motivation...etc. As for the limits, we will put the stress on the isolation of which the user of ICT could be a victim. The authors mentioned above propose in detail the benefits of ICT for learners on different levels. Psychologically, for example, they mention the fact that the use of ICT stimulates the motivation and interest of the learner and at the same time helps him to get rid of his shyness. On the social level, the internet promotes exchanges through social networks and helps to create possible collaborations. Pedagogically, the context becomes richer and pushes the teacher to explore new perspectives while trying to adopt and adapt their learners, which encourages interactivity into the classroom. In addition, we will choose one last aspect of the use of ICT that focuses on convenience and this in relation to the accessibility of the internet and the computer compared to other means such as the library.

What about the disadvantages and limits of ICT? We have seen above that ICT presents a significant series of advantages, but like any invention, they also present limits such as dependence, isolation and even physical and mental fatigue due to the excessive use of this tool.

If the computer, the software, the Internet, further stimulate the curiosity of learners and respond more easily and quickly to their needs and interests, they can also create problems in terms of attention, understanding, memory, and even prevent the essential processes of synthesis and assimilation of knowledge thus acquired. (Defays & Mattioli-Thonard, 2012, p. 3)

Chaptal (2003) proposes to study ICT in a comprehensive way in order to understand the different dimensions of the problem. The aim is to highlight the actual use of ICT and emphasize its primary role in the different areas of use. Chaptal insists on the contribution of ICT not only to the learner but also to society. In *Integrating Technology and Learning to Teach: a Systemic Perspective*, Bangou (2006), explains, in turn, the importance of ICT and their integration into the teaching

process, yet he stressed the urgency of training ICT teachers, so that they could use them effectively in their teaching/training function. The training institutes are also concerned, they must take charge of the teachers and instruct them in the TICE. In this vein, Rivero (2014) underlines the impact of the use of ICT in the way of teaching foreign languages.

As a result of this technological revolution there is a change in the roles of language teacher and learner. The language teacher is now thinking about how to integrate technology into its course and how this change can improve the process of language acquisition. (p. 19)

To conclude, we can say that ICT can be used according to the objectives set in relation to the object of study. In the case of language teaching, ICT must accompany the learner in order to improve his level without making him dependent and isolated from the outside world.

### ***The Notion of Quality***

In this era of globalization witnessed by today's world, man has no choice but to try to adapt to change by perfecting his trajectory each time, and by providing himself with a suitable tool to facilitate his ascension. In our paper, we address this quest for quality in the university environment and more specifically in the field of teaching / learning foreign languages, especially the French language. Likewise, we link the use of ICT to high quality teaching.

For Cheng (2016), quality is a buzzword in university. He wonders what it is. Is it for university teaching or student learning experience... or a set of standards and criteria that we use to measure educational outcomes? "Quality has become a key term in higher education since the 1980s. There are a lot of debates on the meaning of quality and its evaluation methods, but quality remains an elusive and contested concept" (Harvey & Williams, 2010, as cited in Cheng, 2016, p. 1). According to Cheng, there are two important definitions for quality: fitness for purpose and value for money, but they are misused specially in university, because they were created for economic need, "The use of these definitions for management purposes ignores the emancipatory power of higher education and the development needs of academics and students" (Cheng, 2016, p. 1). One of the aims of fitness for purpose is management by objectives. Institutions can define their objectives and quality is demonstrated by achieving these objectives. The purpose has to deal with the students' interest. The notion of value for money is closely related to the fact that the customers or the students are willing to pay for better quality (Cheng, 2016).

### **Methodology**

Research in the language sciences involves several disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and didactics; they all aspire to the development of a scientific knowledge that is based according to Blanchet on "an explicit modality of accumulation of empirical experiments (the method) according to a project of answer to a questioning explicitly justified (the problematic)" (Blanchet & Chardenet, 2011, p. 10). For the sake of this work, we have exploited a research that we carried out as part of our doctoral thesis entitled *The Perception of French among Algerian Learners of Private Foreign Language Schools*. We distributed a questionnaire containing 35 questions from which we chose 06 to highlight the problematic of this research paper. Researchers, in general, and sociolinguists, in particular consider the questionnaire, as being the best means used in a quantitative survey, because it allows collecting precise information that best identifies the purpose

of the research being undertaken. . Like any research tool, the questionnaire is used to verify a hypothesis emitted by the researcher, who must measure all the parameters involved in order to guarantee an adequate result.

In what follows, we will submit the data of our survey to a double analysis. The first will be quantitative, and will deal with statistics that will help us to shed light on some details; the second analysis will be qualitative, therefore descriptive, and hermeneutical. It will help to justify our epistemological choices as to the formulation of our initial questioning. However, before, we would like to give an overview of the Intensive Language Teaching Center where we carried out part of our investigation.

### **The Center of Intensive Language Teaching**

Faced with the phenomenon of globalization, the Algerian university, like the universities of other countries of the world, gives a great importance to the teaching / learning of foreign languages.

The Center of Intensive Language Teaching (CILT) of Biskra University provides a technical support during learning, training and retraining in foreign languages. The spoken language is one of the skills required to succeed, whatever the specialty. All categories of the population actually have the means to acquire knowledge in foreign languages and the ability to use these languages as it allows them to meet their communication needs and more particularly:

- to deal with situations of daily life in multilingual environments,
- to exchange information and ideas with people who speak another language and to communicate their thoughts and feelings,
- to understand well the way of life and mentality of other people and their cultural heritage.

For better acquisition, the center offers a computer platform ICT' (digital laboratory rooms, TVs, Datashow ... etc.)

The CILT provides specialized training in order to pass the following tests:

- TCF: Knowledge Test of French.
- DELF: Diploma of French Language Studies.
- DALF: Advanced Diploma in French Language.

Also, CEIL offers FOS training: French for Specific Purposes

- ESP: English for specific Purposes.
- TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language.

These courses are designed for academic or professional purposes. As it provides training, “à la carte” and “face to face “training that are interested, in particular, businessmen.

The languages offered by CILT Biskra are French, English, Spanish, Italian, German and Turkish.

The CILT uses the methods of teaching of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is based on the four competences: oral comprehension, oral production,

written comprehension and written production, and this according to the levels going from A1 to C1.

### Results and Analysis

As mentioned above, we will use 06 questions from a questionnaire that contains 35 and which has been distributed to 150 learners of private schools and the language center, the letter L reference to the learner. It seems important to outline a brief description of the learners of the sample of our investigation, to know their language profile, to try to determine their socio-cultural affiliation, as well as their competence and their familiarity with the French language.

The peculiarity of these learners is that they are heterogeneous at more than one level, especially at the linguistic and sociocultural levels, and is worth noting the presence of several elements already graduated in other disciplines, various fields such as medicine and architecture, civil servants and university students in various branches including French. They belong to an age group between 18 and 50 years old. The level of French practised by these learners differs from one group to another. There are several levels (CEFR), level A1.1 (Initial level), A1, A2 and B1. Also noteworthy is a strong female presence. These learners opted for private schools as a last resort to improve their level in French.

#### Q1. Why did you decide to take private lessons?

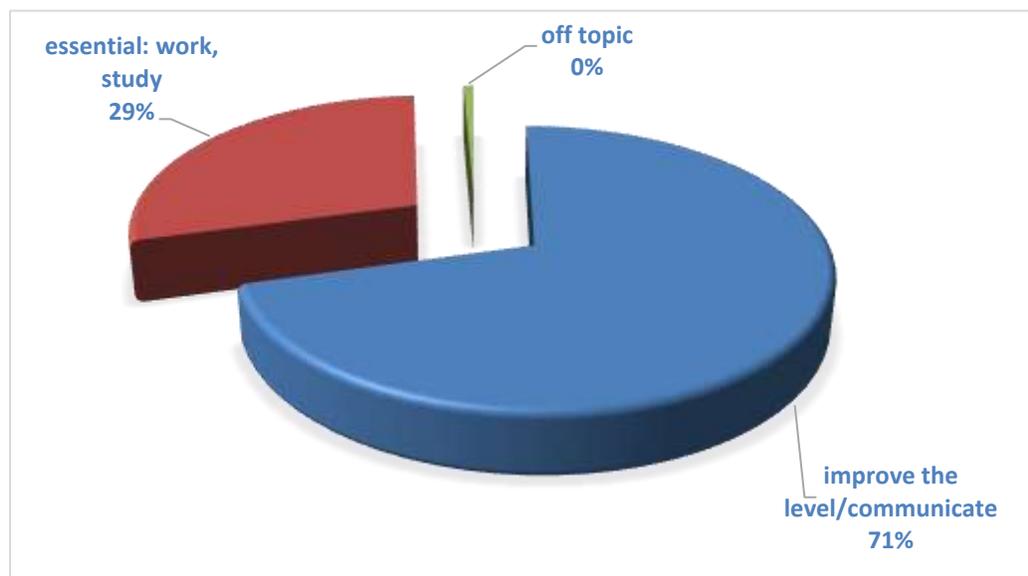


Figure 1. The reasons behind private lessons

Seventy-one percent of learners say that they have decided to take these courses to improve their level and to communicate better in French, in fact, they have a real problem in spoken. L53: "to improve my language and to speak well", L150: "I like the French language and I want to improve my level to speak and communicate easily", 29% follow these courses because they use French in their studies and their work. L19: because this language is important for my work in the administration, L115: "because I need in my field as a researcher".

## Q2. Why you did not learn this language in schools?

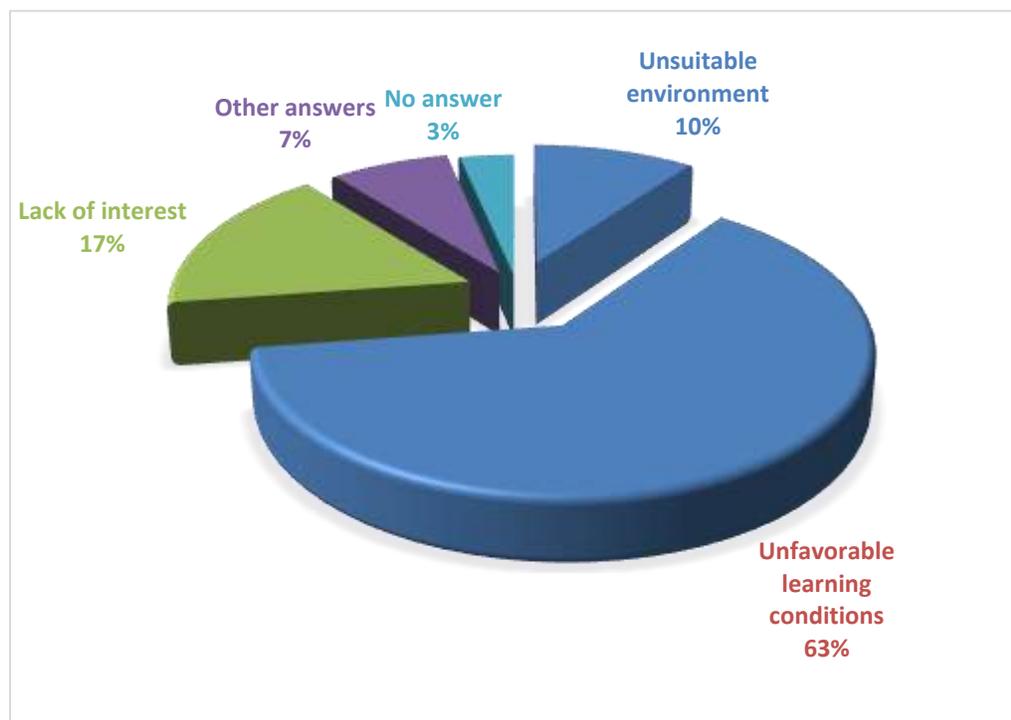
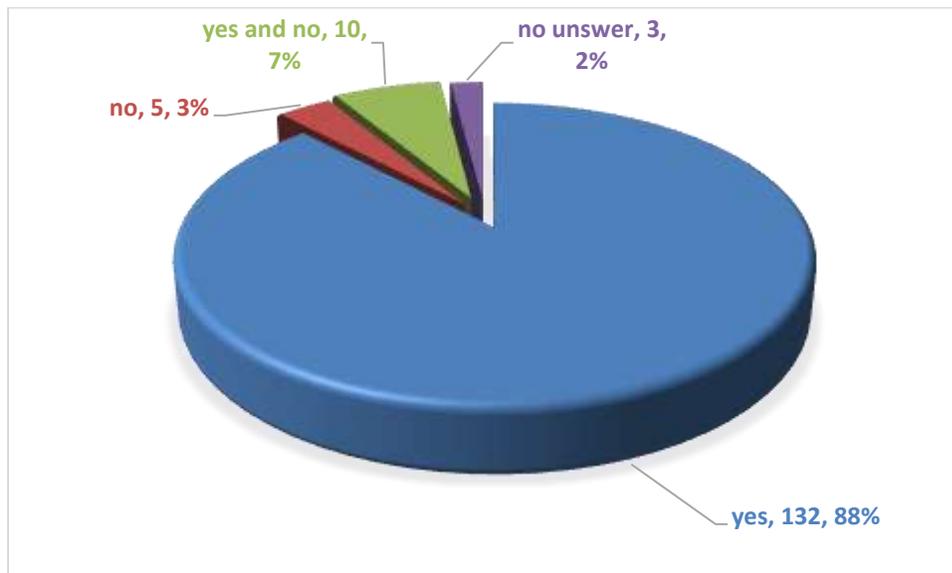


Figure 2. The difficulties of learning French at school

Sixty three percent of learners explain in their answers the reasons that prevented them from learning French at school. The first cause chosen by the majority of learners is the learning conditions considered unfavorable by the respondents. These conditions include, first and foremost, the courses taught, that is, the programs which, according to the learners, do not adapt to their actual needs or their level. Then the teacher is implicated, either because he does not speak French and mainly uses Arabic in his class, or because he ignores the teaching method. L31: "the teacher is not able to receive the information to the students", L108: "since the methods are false and stupid they explain in Arabic in the science of French more many things that I cannot explain now" 17% insisted that they did not show an interest in French when they were in school. L24: "I am not interested". 10% blamed this linguistic failure on the environment in which they lived at that time. This is first of all, the fault of the society, one like the other did not encourage the respondents to learn French. L12: "There is no encouragement and the environment uses only Arabic (...)". The rest of the responses were unworkable, as is the case with the L44 learner whose answer to this question was "maybe the academic status is not appropriate" and L45: "if I learned". Nevertheless, there is one that has caught our attention: L93, who explained that the cause of her failure in learning French, is the fact that she studied English as a first foreign language in primary school, and not French. She said she was a victim of the education system. 5% did not give an answer.

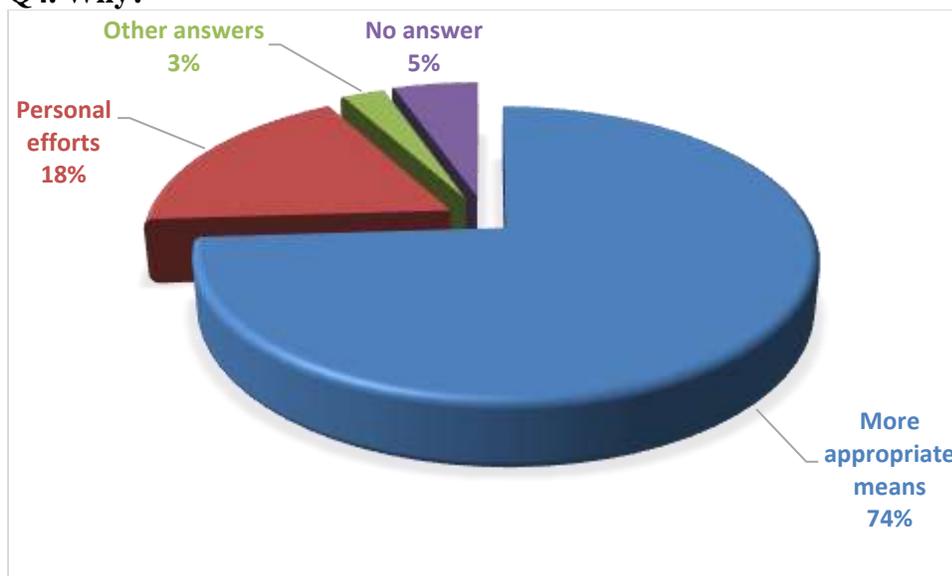
**Q3. Do you think you can learn it more easily in this school?**



**Figure. 3 The ease of learning French at private school**

Learners attending private foreign language schools are all looking to improve their language level. 88% think they can improve it in these private schools. 3% think no - an answer that contradicts the enrollment process in a private language school. 7% are not sure and hesitate between yes and no.

**Q4. Why?**



**Figure. 4 The reasons**

74% of learners, who thought they could learn better in these private schools, argue with a focus on the teaching methods used. These include language labs, CEFR methods, qualified teachers, and developed spaces. L16: "because the methods used are simple and precise", A23: "the teacher

hears", L58: "fewer students per class"). 18% think that they will achieve this through their personal efforts. L70: "I am aware of my faults, I can correct them".

**Q5. What did French represent for you before attending this school?**



**Figure. 5 Representations of French language before private school**

73% of learners conveyed negative representations. The terms used to express this negativity are numerous, L19: "hard", L31: "bad", L54: "my only point of weakness", L128: "a language I hate". 61 learners used the difficult term to show how far they could not learn this language and were inevitably in a situation of linguistic insecurity. 9% of learners gave other representations that we were unable to place in either the first or the second category. For example, L100: "a spoils of war", this joins the category of colonial representations that we have already mentioned in our analysis.

**Q6. What does French represent for you today?**



**Figure. 6 Representations of French language today**

After deciding to enroll in private foreign language schools to learn French, the perception of these learners towards this language has changed from negative to positive. In fact, 77% admit that they now have a positive outlook as they begin to master this language. This fact decreases the degree of insecurity that invaded them each time they were preparing to use French. L19: "good", L54: "I like it a lot I improve my level little by little". 8% of learners have negative representations, even after attending private schools to learn French. L42: "difficult complex". 10% of the responses did not meet any of the criteria in our analysis.

### Synthesis

In the above section, we undertook a quantitative analysis, corroborated by a qualitative and interpretative analysis. We believe that the statistics presented inform, for many, the relationship of the use of ICT and the improvement of the level of learners in French. According to the results of Q1, the goal is, for 71% of learners, to improve their level in French and to succeed in communicating. On the same theme, 63% of learners attributed their low level of French to the unfavorable teaching conditions they experienced (Q2). These conditions represented a demotivating factor for these learners. In this regard, Dörnyei (2001) presents the results of a survey on foreign language learning conducted in Budapest with a group of unmotivated students. The purpose of this study was to identify the most obvious demotivating factors. Dörnyei proposed nine in order of importance - from the most important to the least: the teacher, inadequate educational infrastructure, lack of confidence, negative attitude towards the L2, the compulsory nature of the study of the L2, interference from another foreign language, negative attitude towards the L2 community, group attitudes and the manual. (Lasagabaster, 2006). If we quoted this study, it is because our learners gave the same reasons as those proposed by Dörnyei, to justify the linguistic failure of which they are the object.

To remedy this level of language, our learners decided to take classes in private schools. We believe that this stage marks the point of change in their linguistic background. As a result, 88% of learners think they can learn French more easily in these private schools (Q3). They justify this choice by the more appropriate means used in these schools (Q4).

Learners were asked about the nature of representations they had of the French language before and after enrollment in private schools, and after this registration. 73% had negative representations. They saw French as a difficult, harsh and detestable language, and it was even a question of colonial representations that linked French to the colonial period (Q5), and which are anchored in the value system of learners. We believe that the nature of these representations prevented these learners from learning the French language in the past. This explains their level, which hardly improved before their enrollment in private schools. By taking French lessons, the perception of this same slice of learners' changes. This confirms a part of our hypotheses where we supposed, that the nature of the representations could affect the process of learning foreign languages. Facts confirmed by 77% of learners who, after taking French lessons, now have for this language, positive representations that help them better understand the learning process (Q6).

### Conclusion

We have tried to demonstrate, through this article, that the use of ICT in our universities can lead to improvement and therefore quality in teaching in a general way and in the teaching of foreign

languages, French in a particular way. We gave an overview on ICT and the concept of quality. We have also presented the center of intensive language teaching at the University of Biskra in Algeria. The goal is to introduce the experimentation through which we have planned to answer our initial problematic: what are the implications of using ICT in the process of teaching/learning foreign languages? Does digital age provide more independence for the learner? And which deals with the relationship of ICT to the notion of quality. Through the results obtained, we were able to confirm our hypotheses. Indeed, the ICT sharpens the learners' willingness and desires to learn while facilitating their access to language and culture. It installs him in a report of independence thus favoring the acquisition of the skills.

However, it must be emphasized that the use of ICT is not the only guarantee of quality or even the first. According to other field research, we have noticed that the first guarantor of quality in any teaching / learning process is the teacher. It is therefore necessary to train teachers well and provide them with tools that guarantee quality education.

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