

## CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING ICT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN ALBANIA

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Despite a great desire and high motivation of Albanians to learn foreign languages, second language teaching and learning has been a challenge for the Albanian context. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Albanians have shown real interest and serious engagement in learning and mastering classical and/or western languages. However, over the decades, the willing desire of both Albanian teachers and students has encountered various challenges. In the more recent years, a new phase has come for the teacher and learner of a second language. With the advent of highly developing technologies, teachers face the challenge of keeping up to date with their pupils’ or students’ natural inclination towards using technology even in the process of teaching and learning. For several reasons which will be treated in this article, this new ‘thing’ has met with resistance on the part of the more traditional teachers. There is constantly a mixture of feeling associating the use of technology in the classroom. Some are not well trained to do that, others fear it will take more time to prepare, and still others see it more as a threat than as an asset. This paper will deal with the most obvious challenges that teachers have to face when trying to integrate ICT in the English language classroom in the Albanian context. This treatment will consist of theoretical observations, field work and data analysis and final remarks and conclusions about these challenges that arise as teachers try to integrate ICT in the classroom.

**Key words:** ICT in teaching, challenges, English language teaching

### 1. Introduction and Background for ICT Use

The process of teaching and learning a foreign language takes time and appears to be quite involving and, at times, rather strenuous on both the part of the teacher and the student. The traditional pattern or practice of teaching and learning a foreign language in an Albanian context has been characterised by the interaction of the teaching and the students. For a number of decades, the teacher has been the major (if not the only) source of information and instruction for the students. Very little has ever interfered in this model of communication in the classroom where the teacher would deliver the information in a traditional way of presenting new input for the students who eventually had to memorise the subject matter and try to reproduce it in the effort of learning or acquiring a language.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there was a new approach to teaching and learning. Educationalists like Jerome Bruner argued that people learn best when they learn in an active rather than a passive manner. Bruner argues that the reason we learn language so quickly is due to the method we use [1]. As we are introduced to words, we use them. We test them out. Words immediately became practical. We can quickly see why it helps us to know these words. The transition from a passive way of learning to a more active pattern of

acquiring a language has been facilitated by various technological means over the past several decades. This has been true especially for the countries where the students are not living in a native speaking environment.

ICT provides the language teacher with a relatively safe environment (*provided the teacher "feels" confident with the media*), but also a strongly realistic use of language, thus providing a reason to learn. *It is very clear that we, language teachers, need to focus on the use of the living language*, and ICT makes it easy for us to do so.

Research in the field has shown that computerized media and a multimedia environment can be helpful for learning foreign languages [2]. It has been asserted that on-line debate is an excellent medium for generating social construction of knowledge [3]. The whole process of integrating ICT in the classroom can go alongside the principle of task-based language teaching (TBLT) [4]. Task-based activities are found to promote interaction, and the language of the participants is reported to be typical of negotiation for meaning [5-6]. What else could facilitate such a practice more than the use of ICT in a foreign languages classroom environment?

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) claims to promote learner autonomy, although the role of the teacher always remains fundamental in the whole process. A considerable amount of evidence supports the view that cooperative learning, including project-oriented learning, can lead to the enhanced learner autonomy [7-8]. The emerging role of the educational institutions, specifically the new role of the foreign language teacher, is to prepare students for the life outside the academic setting. Thus, such a role requires the teachers to come to a new perception of teaching and pedagogical innovation from a sociocultural perspective. Recent approaches to foreign languages teaching and learning have been proposed a more progressive uses of computer technologies [9-10].

The accepted role of the teacher as “controller” in a language classroom, in what Jeremy Harmer calls “lockstep” (teacher explaining everything, providing all the contents and students assimilating the information received), is severely defied [11]. So we, and our institutions, are to adopt more flexible patterns of classroom distribution and clearly redefine the patterns of behaviour.

## 2. The Advent of ICT in Albanian Schools

In Albania, until recently, technology has not been considered for its crucial importance in the teaching and learning process, especially when it comes to the context of the foreign language classroom. Previously, especially during communism, the language was acquired only in the isolated context of the classroom. The teacher was the source of knowledge and the only point of reference for the students. Thus, the students were not exposed to the living language they were trying to learn. Teachers who would be native speakers of a language were non-existent in Albania due to various reasons. On the other hand, technology was very scanty and non-functional so as to facilitate language learning for the students of a foreign language [12].

In the early 1990-s, Albania opened to the rest of the world and in the years to follow it was exposed to the rapid development of technology. The recent years have witnessed an outrageous growth of ICT even in Albania. The availability of technological items and access to the world wide web have brought a new era for education as well. According to the statistic of the Ministry of Education and Science of Albania, courses of ICT have been offered for more than fifteen years in universities throughout the country. Departments of

ICT have been established in many of our universities and the specializing courses are offered for almost all branches of study at our educational institutions [13].

From 2006, the government has announced a new era in education, the era of ICT and Internet. This new orientation has been expressed by means of special attention to the establishment of ICT labs in most high schools and universities in the country [14]. For many years the government has provided training for various professionals who are potential users of ICT at work or in schools [15-16].

### 3. Description of the Case Study

A survey was conducted to observe and study the situation of the use of ICT in the foreign language classroom in a number of High Schools and at “Luigj Gurakuqi” University of Shkodra. All of the high schools and the one university included in the process of the surveying are state run educational institutions. The survey was conducted with both teachers and students. The method of survey was face to face interview. The first part of the survey was very similar for both teachers and students. It consisted of open response questions, ranking questions and multiples choice questions. It was geared towards revealing the general current state of ICT use in the language teaching and learning.

One type of survey was conducted with teachers and professors of foreign languages including English, Italian, French and German. The total number of the foreign language teachers who were interviewed on account of their own willingness to do so was 100.

Another one was conducted with high school students who study one or more foreign languages in their schools and with university students who are specializing in a given foreign language at our university. The total number of the foreign language students who were interviewed on account of their free choice to do so was 500. The distribution of the surveyed population was as indicated in the following table:

Name of the institution	Number of teachers	Number of students
“Shejnaze Juka” High School for Foreign Languages	26	60
“28 Nentori” General High School	10	40
“Jordan Misja” General High School	10	40
“Oso Kuka” General High School	6	30
“Arben Broci” Professional High School	6	30
General High School in Velipoja	2	20
General High School in Mes	2	20
General High School in Bushat	2	20
General High School in Koplik	6	
“Luigj Gurakuqi” University	30	240
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total 500</b>

All the data was appropriately processed and analyzed through the adequate software such as SPSS and NVIVO. The processing of the data yielded the following findings concerning the situation of ICT use in region of Shkodra, northern Albania.

## 4. Findings and analysis

### 4.1. Teachers' Perception of the Current Use of ICT in the Classroom

The section of the questions addressed to the teachers reveals the following situation in ICT use in language teaching classrooms. When asked “How do you feel about ICT in the language classroom?” out of 100 foreign language teachers, 44% of them answered that they felt *reluctant*, 35% said that they were *interested* in the subject, 12% reported that they felt *enthusiastic* about it, 4% were *indifferent* and 5% *did not want to answer* this question. This clearly shows that the prevailing feeling about ICT use in language classrooms is

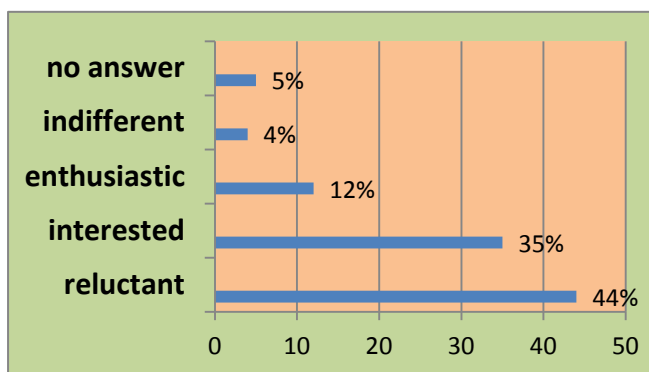


Figure 1. How teachers feel about using ICT in classroom

reluctance, perhaps associated with a sense of fear or insecurity.

When asked “How well-trained are you to use ICT in the language classroom?” out of 100 foreign language teachers, 9% of them answered that they were *proficient*, 17% said that they were *well-trained*, 24% reported that they had *average* knowledge and training, 29% reported themselves to be *below average* and 21% stated that they had done *no training* for ICT use in the classroom. The results show that there is a certain distribution of the situation, those who see themselves as below average or with no training at all take relatively high percentages, respectively 29% and 21%.

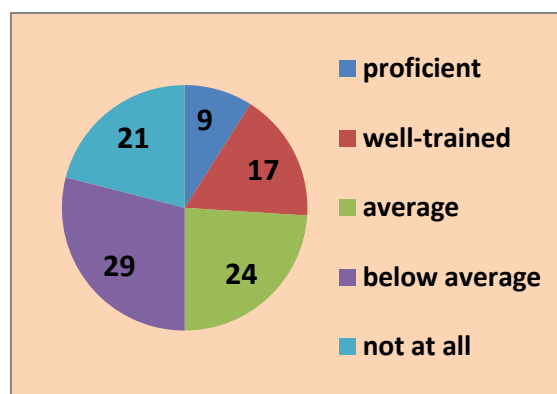
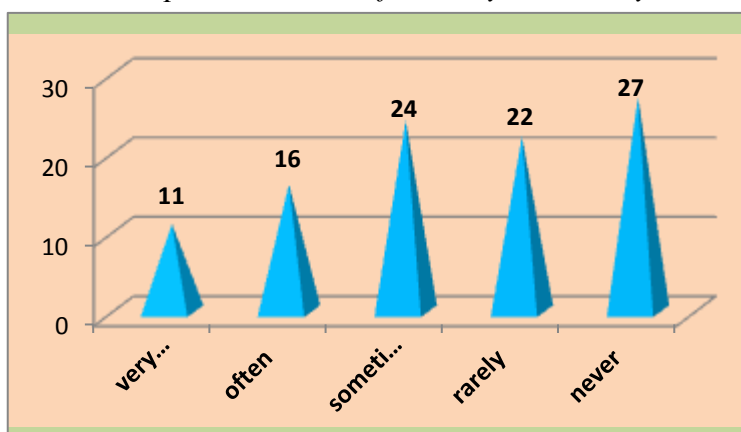


Figure 2. How well trained teachers believe they are

To the question “How often do you use any item of technology in the classroom?”



teachers responded in the following way. 11% of them said they use it *very often*, 16% use it *often*, 24% *sometimes*, 22% *rarely* and 27% *never*. As shown from the results, a great number of teachers still remain in the realm of using ICT *rarely to never*.

Figure 3. Frequency of ICT use by the teachers

Another question they had to answer was “How do students respond when/if you use ICT in the English language classroom?” It was meant to allow teachers to provide from 2 to 5 responses that characterized the response of students to ICT use. Among their answers I was able to collect the following: 33% say that the students *interact*, 42% said they *pay more*

attention, 29% state they are *more involved*, 37% reported that they *learn better*, 52% say they *enjoy class more*, 60% report that they *concentrate more* and 24% say that they *learn more accurately*. Evidently, the benefits of the use of ICT in the classroom are undoubtedly substantial. Relatively high percentages report of very useful outcome of using ICT.

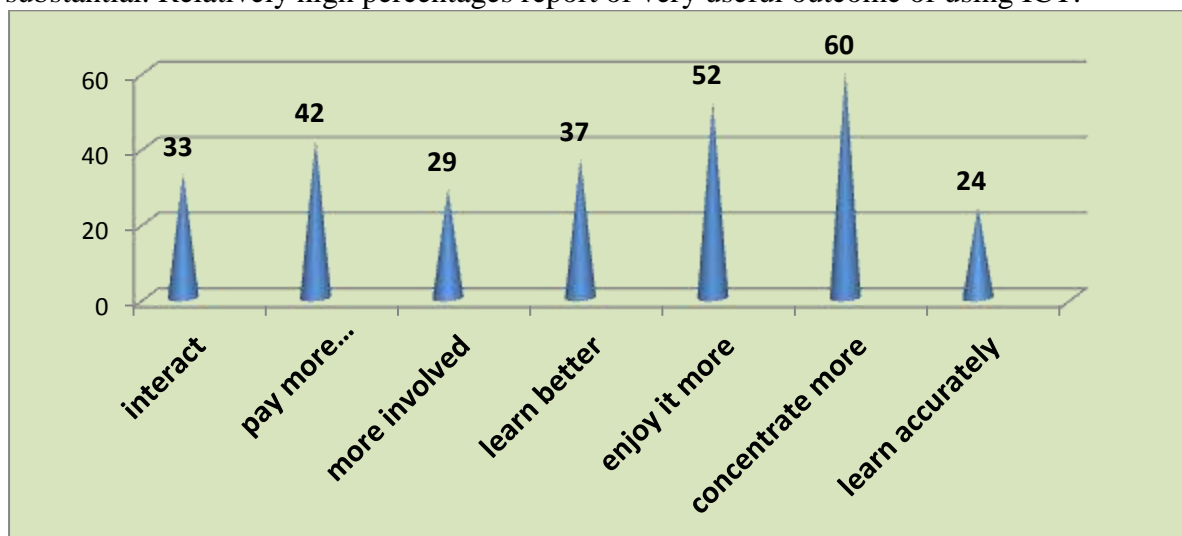
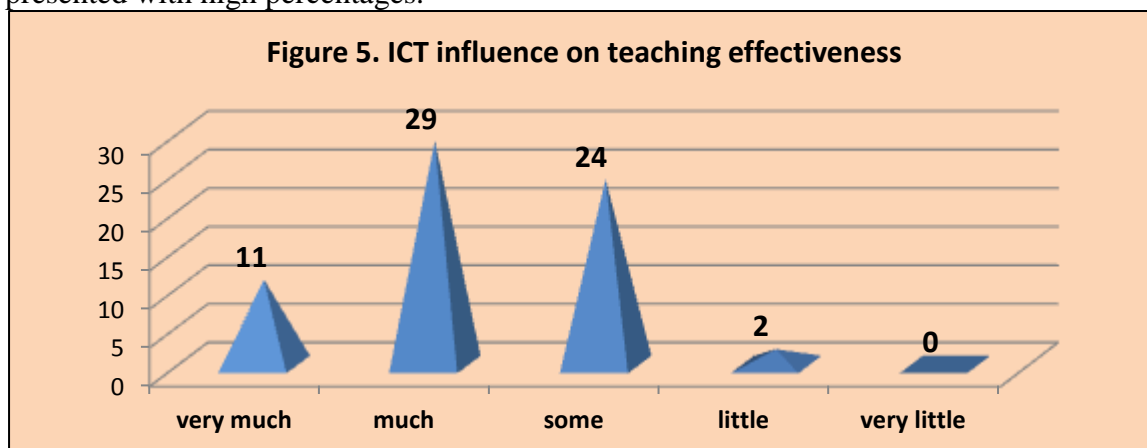


Figure 1. How students respond when ICT is used

When asked “How much does ICT use influence your effectiveness in teaching a foreign language?”, out of 73 teachers who have used ICT to any degree reported the following: 18% say their teaching is influenced *very much*, 40% say *much*, 28% *some*, 10% *little*, 4% *very little* and no one chose *not at all*. Thus, the impact of ICT on teaching effectiveness is presented with high percentages.



When asked “In your opinion what are the most common challenges for using ICT in teaching a foreign language?”, the teachers reported the following free responses: **infrastructure** is mentioned by 76%, **pedagogical adjustment** is mentioned by 73%, **affects the role of the teachers** is mentioned by 65%, **cost and maintenance** is mentioned by 64%, **reduces imagination and creativity** is mentioned by 61%, **requires time to prepare** is mentioned by 56%, **dismisses the book** is mentioned by 52%, **passive learning** is mentioned by 51%, **accuracy of sources** is mentioned by 43%, **excessive use becomes boring** is mentioned by 37%.

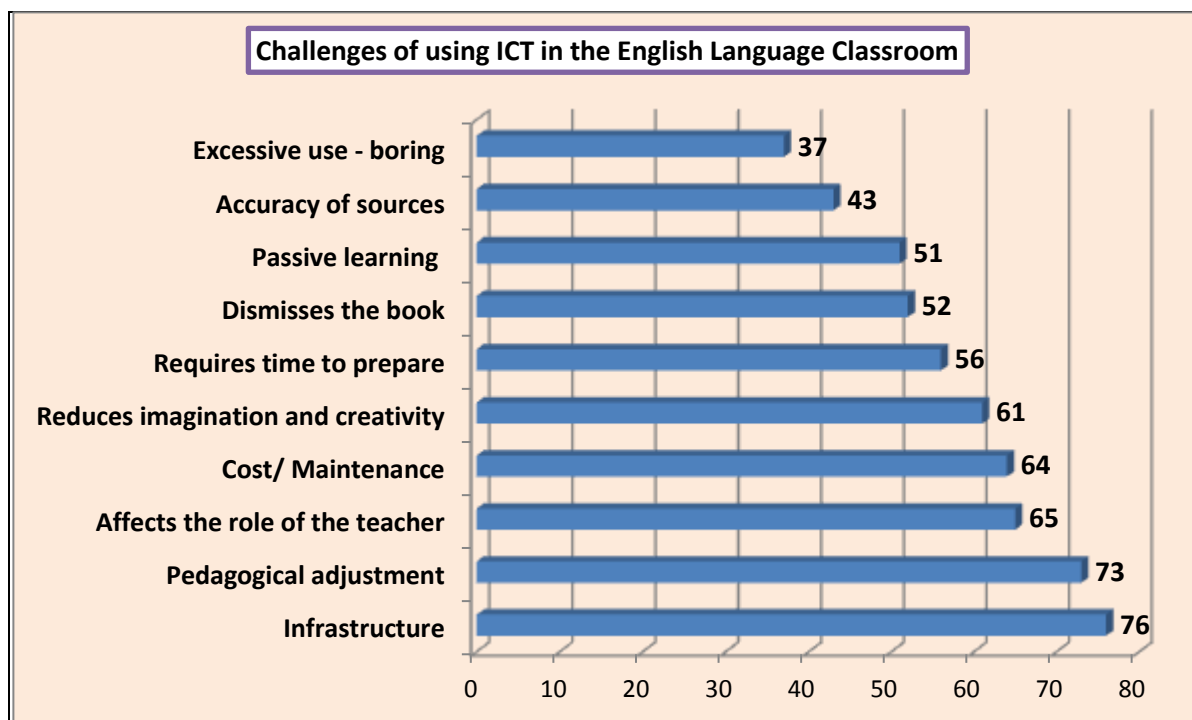


Figure 6. Challenges of using ICT in teaching a foreign language

#### 4.2. Students' View of the Current Use of ICT in the Classroom

A significant number of students expressed their willingness to participate in the surveying. A total of 500 students of both levels chose to answer any questions concerning the topic. The purpose was to observe how students perceive the use of ICT in the classroom, especially in the foreign language classroom. When asked “*How do you feel about ICT in the language classroom?*” out of 500 foreign language students of both high school and university levels, 223 students or 44.6% of them answered that they felt *curious*, 342 or 68.4% said that they were *interested* in the subject, 421 or 84.2% reported that they felt *involved* in the class, 443 or 88.6% stated that they were *excited* about it and 83 or 16.6% said that they felt *indifferent* to the topic. This clearly shows that the prevailing feeling about ICT use in language classrooms involves interest, curiosity, involvement and excitement, all of which facilitate the teaching and learning of any language.

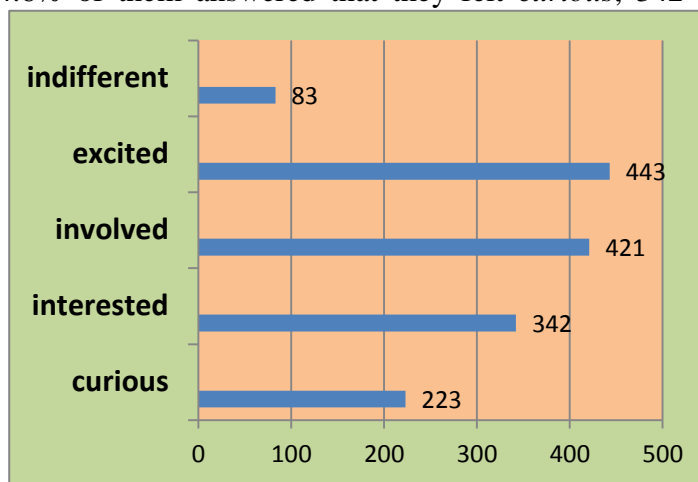


Figure 7. How students feel about ICT in classroom

To the question “*How often is ICT used in the classroom?*”, the students responded as follows: 43 students or 8.6% said very often, 65 students or 13% said often, 92 students or 18.4% chose sometimes, 134 students or 26.8% marked rarely and 166 students or 33.2% chose never. The report is quite discouraging when we notice that the students who report

ICT use between never and rarely constitute way more than half of the total number of the students interviewed, more specifically 60% of the whole group.

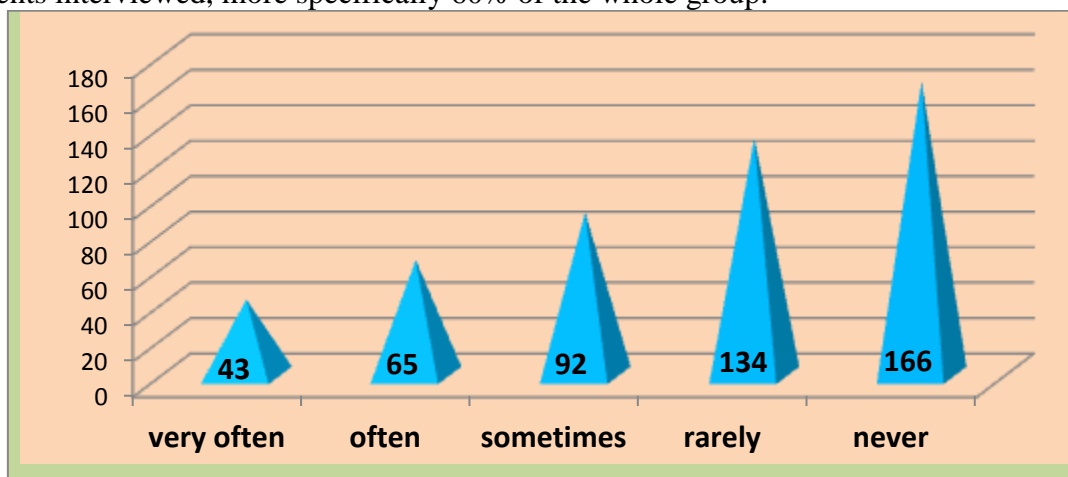


Figure 8. Frequency of ICT use in the classroom from the students viewpoint

A third and last question posed to the students was “*How much does ICT use influence your effectiveness in learning a foreign language?*” Their responses varied as follows: 242 students or 48.4% chose very much, 161 students or 32.2% marked much, 55 students or 11% ticked some, 22 students or 4.4% said little, 14 students or 2.8% chose very little and 6 or 1.2% marked not at all. As it can be clearly seen from the data, the perception of students speaks highly of the use of ICT in the classroom. The percentages mark a high impact on the students learning of a foreign language.

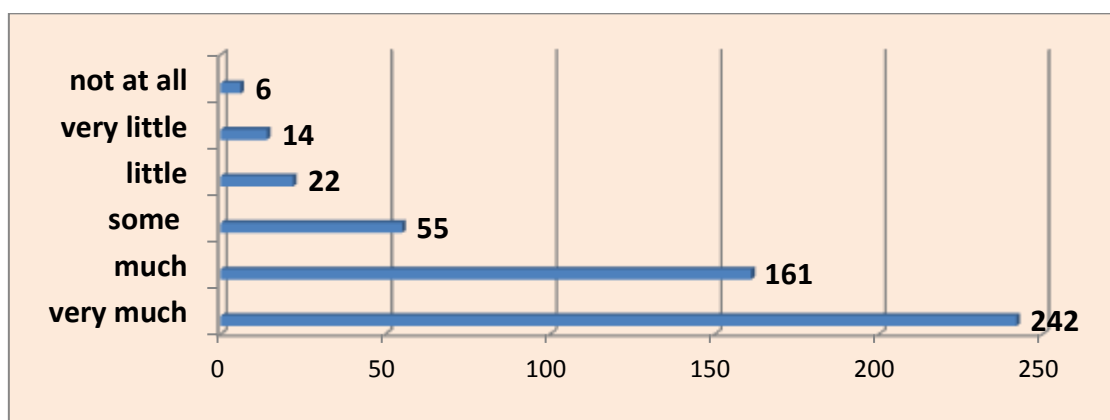


Figura 9. ICT influence on learning effectiveness

When the students were asked “*In your opinion what are the most common challenges for using ICT in teaching a foreign language?*”, they gave the following free responses: 386 – 77.2% mentioned **willing and trained teachers**, 367 – 73.4% mentioned **appropriate equipment**, 289 – 57.8% mentioned **effective use of ICT**, 254 – 50.8% mentioned **distraction**, and 301 – 60.2% **resources**.

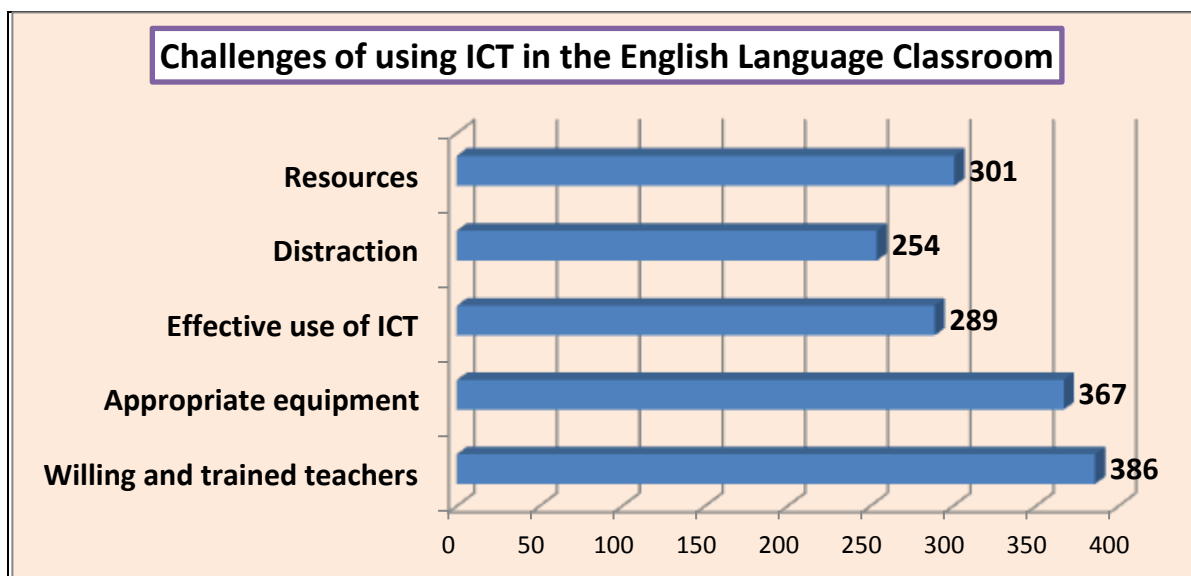


Figure 11. Challenges of using ICT in teaching a foreign language

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Technologies in general and computers in particular, have entered the teaching and learning environment slowly over time. ICT has produced varying experiences in the teaching staff and in the students of Albanian schools, especially in the foreign language classrooms.

A few conclusions can be drawn based on what has been observed both in teachers and students. Teachers are highly characterized by a feeling of reluctance and fear in great numbers, significant numbers of teachers do not use ICT at all or hardly ever and training seems to be a big problem for foreign language teachers. Evidently, the benefits of the use of ICT in the classroom are undoubtedly substantial. Relatively high percentages report of very useful outcome of using ICT. And lastly, the impact of ICT on teaching effectiveness is presented with high percentages.

As a result, there should be more training sessions which focus on equipping teachers for ICT use in the classroom and for encouraging them to use it more often and to consider its benefits in their teaching. The integration of ICT in the Albanian classroom of foreign language teaching should really be a priority. Other areas of focus should be: implementation of the national strategy for ICT in the schools, more training for teachers, applying for grants, public subsidies, private donations, fund-raising events, in-kind support (e.g., equipment, volunteers), collaboration between the government and local community and so on. All of these would improve the necessary conditions for easier and more efficient use of ICT in the teaching and learning process in our schools.



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