



## Improving the Teaching and Learning of English Language Through the Use of Information and Communication Technology: Prospects and Challenges

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### Abstract

*The impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on language learning has been acknowledged globally such that the integration of ICT in language learning has become indispensable in today's teaching-learning environment. This is because of the fundamental role it plays in the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge in language learning. This is more so when the world is fast becoming a global village where the use of modern technological gadgets to improve language learning has become imperative. This paper examines some stereotyped but strenuous methods of language learning and highlights some of the prospects (expanding access to and improving the quality of teaching and learning, enhancing language competence and learners' interaction and verbalization, among others) derivable from using ICT for optimal performance. Some of the challenges (no internet facilities, erratic power supply, overcrowded classrooms and so on) facing the use of ICT in language learning in a developing country like Nigeria are also discussed. Provision of internet facilities in schools, regular supply of electricity are some of the recommendations made to improve language learning through ICT.*

*Keywords: Language, multimedia, gadgets, foreign language teaching (FLT), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Fulcrum.*

### 1. Introduction

The English language is generally acknowledged as a global language, in view of its numerous functions and preference over several other languages around the globe. Going by the history of English Language, it is important to note that it started with the coming of the three Germanic tribes namely: the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, who invaded Britain during the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and crossed the North Sea from what is now modern day Denmark and northern Germany. Before the invasion of Britain by the three Germanic tribes, the language spoken by the inhabitants of Britain was a Celtic language. Shortly after the invasion however, the language that was confined to Britain around the 5<sup>th</sup> century has gone beyond the boundaries of Britain and is still spreading like wild fire.

Apart from being a language of global unification, English is also seen as a veritable tool for learning, business and interactional purposes, among other functions. In view of its relevance, English is not only the mother tongue in Britain but also the mother tongue of several other countries like Canada, the United States of America, New Zealand, to mention just a few. It is also used as a second and a foreign language (EFL) in many countries like Nigeria, Ghana and many other developing countries.

Based on the foregoing, it has become imperative for English Language teachers and learners to realize the fundamental role of information and communication technology as a catalyst in the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge in language acquisition which is a prerequisite to the viability of the global economic development.

### 1.2 Teaching and Learning English Language in the Traditional Classroom Setting

Gone were the days when teaching of English was restricted to all that the teacher had to say to the learners, a situation which made learners inactive in the teaching-learning situation. Be that as it may and without mincing words, the time has come for teachers and learners of English to realize the fundamental role of information and communication technology not only in the area of language teaching and learning but also in the global economy where the proficient use of English is fast assuming the indispensable engine of growth and development. It has therefore become expedient to note that the effective teaching and learning of English has gone beyond the stereotypical to regimented/tradition of mere classroom teaching because of the emergence of various gadgets in information and communication technology.

According to Brown (1980) second language education has changed considerably, pointing out the importance of the use of an “electric enlightened approach” to theory building but cautions that classroom contact is still very necessary for second language learners to give real-world validity to their theory building. Brown’s theoretical comments about the classroom vignettes contribute to the attainment of this goal as major methodological approaches and current issues in language teaching are depicted in these vignettes, first with the direct method, grammar translation and the Audio-Lingual method.

Similarly, Randall (2006) has admitted that technology has become a major component; a must-have in many homes around the world, with its concomitant influence permeating all facets of human lives, including education. This is a welcome development by many as it shows the direction in which language instruction will be driven by new advancements in technology.

### **1.3 ICT in Communicative/Learning modes**

In any teaching-learning situation, learners can respond at ease for communicative mode of teaching. According to Madhavi (2010), communicative method for learning languages combines extensively, high-quality content with flexible and interactive multimedia technology. This comprehensive language learning method can act as a total solution for self-teaching, as well as teaching support to formal courses. Through a wide range of activities, a variety of skills could be developed in a learner. A learner needs to communicate in oral and written comprehension, as well as oral and written expression.

In order to achieve those stated objectives, Madhavi (2010) has identified three possible learning modes as:

- The Guided Mode: this offers a step-by-step course. When organized into learning paths, this mode focuses on the acquisition of functional language patterns across a broad spectrum of themes. In this mode, a learner at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level in Nigeria or lower intermediate level in some other countries can learn pronunciation, grammar, functions of words and vocabulary by applying the rules.
- The Free-to-roam: this gives a learner the option of learning by topic or by linguistic skill. This mode is particularly useful for learners who are at the senior secondary school (SSS) in Nigeria or intermediate level of learning and also for teachers who want to familiarize themselves with the content available to them.
- The dynamic mode: here, the advanced learners can immediately be immersed in an authentic learning context through the various dialogues and videos which illustrate every day and professional life and line with current pedagogical trends, familiarize learners with the voicing of the language using recordings made by native speakers.

Closely related to the communicative/learning modes is the use of language laboratory which can be used to enhance language teaching and learning processes through teacher’s console with language learning software. This serves as a platform for learning, practising and producing language of teaching. The functional use of language laboratory according to Schrum (2000) is attributed to the following objectives:

- To maintain good linguistic competence through accuracy in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.
- To develop pragmatic competence, to understand the grammar form, function and state of normality.
- To enrich the discourse competence, to prepare the learner to be able to produce contextualize written text and speech.
- To acquire strategic competence to use both spoken and written language to use in a wide range of communicating strategies.

In teaching phonetics for example, the sound of English language can be written down using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for adequate exercises. The use of minimal pair perception exercises (sheep – ship, zeal – seal, ten – then, bird – board, shout – tout, port – pot) helps learners learn the sound of English. This can also be well practised on pronunciation exercises with the help of software or by using CDs in language laboratory.

### **1.4 Impact of ICT on Language Teaching and Learning**

Many arguments have been advanced on the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on the teaching and learning of language. While some are of the opinion that it would make students smarter and enhance the teaching and learning of language, others posited that there is no certainty about its possibilities because many educators are not yet familiar with the technology to use and how to apply it in the teaching – learning process (Morse, 1972). For instance, there has been a great deal of debates in the past few decades on the pedagogical worth of computers in the classroom. While some researchers have suggested that technology often remains antiquated, limited to the simple writing assignments and browsing the internet (Cuban, 2001), others have suggested that this has been due in part, to educators’ limited knowledge of the role played by communication technology in language instruction, a situation which shows that the use of computer is only a

medium in which a variety of methods, approaches and pedagogical philosophies are implemented (Garret, 1991). This implies that the use of ICT in language education has its merits and challenges.

### **1.5 Prospects of the use of ICT in Language Education**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is of immense help in virtually all areas of teaching and learning. In the field of language education, there is now so much emphasis on on-line learning, which has been seen as the great liberator by freeing both teachers and students to accomplish learning in new and exciting ways by sourcing information from the Internet (Schrum, 2000).

Other prospects of ICT in language can be summarized as expanding access to language programmes, improving the quality of teaching and learning, providing access to current/ up-to-date materials and offering teachers and learners an avalanche of materials in different modes.

Specifically, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2006) stated amongst others that

- English lessons that incorporate multimedia applications can exert powerful motivation and provide bored students with exciting new ways to learn.
- The use of ICTs enhances English Language competence as well as the quality of learners' experience.
- The effective use of ICTs removes the time and space limitations found in traditional teaching, as classroom dialogue can now extend beyond the time and space constraints.
- It allows students to learn more autonomously and thereby raises self-esteem and confidence.
- It enhances learners' interaction, verbalization and involvement in group collaborative learning.

It is pertinent to note that television with its array of foreign channels, as provided by DSTV and other cable channels can be of tremendous help in language acquisition. Information and communication technology helps the students to perform better in language learning than with regimented traditional classroom teaching. Online learning has the potentials to offer anyone with an internet connection access to a wide expanse but inexpensive education just as e-learning and computer allow schools to deliver classes to students anywhere in the world (Educause, 2010).

### **1.6 Problems/Constraints of the use of ICT in Language Education**

The view that the internet and other forms of information and communication technology are of immense benefit to the education system is incontrovertible. The internet is repository of enormous content but it also contains an equal amount of junk and obscene sites which, if not regulated and censored before students are allowed to work on it, can lead to all forms of moral decadence, especially among teenagers and youths. The teachers are not totally immune from the obscene sites.

The success or failure of a teaching – learning situation in language acquisition rests to a large extent on the teacher. However, it has been discovered that many teachers are yet to upgrade or familiarize themselves with ICT and its application in the classroom setting (Morse, 1972).

Considering the above notion, it can be inferred that the integration of ICTs in language education is still being faced by the general apathy on the part of both the learners and the teachers.

In addition, poverty and perhaps economic mismanagement can be seen as great impediments to the viability and sustainability of the use of ICTs in English Language teaching and learning process not only in Nigeria but also in some other developing countries.

Furthermore, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA 2000) has identified the following as major constraints to the use of ICTs in language education:

- Electricity, phone lines, internet facilities etc. are either unreliable or expensive.
- Video recorders and other ICTs are locked in storage closets because only few teachers know how to operate and incorporate them into their instructional programmes.
- ICT trained teachers often quit teaching for more lucrative jobs because teaching is not attractive especially in Nigeria.
- Poor maintenance of the existing ICT gadgets (where provided) is a debilitating factor against the use of ICT in language education.
- There are no language and computer laboratories in virtually all schools in Nigeria.

Large or overcrowded classes may interfere with the objectives of the use of ICTs

### **1.7 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) cannot be underestimated in language teaching and learning process because emerging technologies make it pertinent and practical to approach learning in ways that have been advocated by scientists, theorists and educational psychologists. It is imperative for modern day

teachers and learners to keep abreast of the modern trend at improving teaching and learning of English Language through the use of Information and Communication Technology. Suffice it to say that information and communication technology has revolutionized society globally, including how language instruction is taught and delivered.

The internet in particular has become a conduit where people can learn, share and collaborate in ways not possible many years before now. A great deal of success however comes from preparing students to interact and learn in this internet age. Therefore, if ICT is integrated into the teaching and learning of language, our renewed approach to the teaching and learning of English will go a long way in making ICT a more rewarding partner in the teaching-learning process.

In the light of the foregoing, it is recommended that teachers should upgrade and familiarize themselves in the use and application of ICT facilities in the acquisition of language education.

The commitment and enthusiasm to the teaching and learning of English through the effective use of ICT should be of utmost importance not only to the curriculum planners and education policy makers but also the teachers and the learners of English.

In order to facilitate the integration of ICT into language learning, the following should be put in place:

- Constant/regular supply of electricity
- Provision of computers in schools for learners and laptops for teachers of English language.
- Recruitment of and adequate remuneration of competent instructors.
- Regular computer training and re-training for English language teachers.
- Provision of internet facilities in schools.

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