
ICT: A PANACEA TO THE PHONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The phonological problems in the teaching and learning of English as a second language (L₂) are the bane of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The second language (L₂) of the students is affected by some features of the first language (L₁). Many factors are responsible for the phonological problems such as the absence of certain speech sounds in the first language (L₁) which hinder the proper articulation of some sounds in the second language L₂. There is the mother tongue interference and phonological differences in the pronunciation of words because of some phonological articulation of words. This paper discusses the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a vital tool to curb the phonological problems in the teaching and learning of English as a second language (L₂) in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It also examines the causes of the phonological problems: the immersion of the students in the first language (L₁), mother tongue interference, the student's level of exposure to spoken English. It also highlights the advantages of ICT in solving phonological problems in teaching and learning phonological aspects of English as a second language in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and states diverse roles of ICT education.

The phonological problems in the teaching and learning of English as a second language have been posing a very big challenge to the learners of English language in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Language holds the key to knowledge acquisition, thus making its teaching and learning process central to any educational system. The prominence of English in the linguistic firmament of Nigeria will remain for as long as its official status remains what it is now. Indeed, one thing that holds a society together is communication. Competent verbal communication is imperative for the development of any human society; hence, the emphasis is placed on it in education generally, all over the world. This suggests that the success of any educational system largely depends on the linguistics success and vice versa. Language is so basic to man that it is considered the key to all other means of communication as well as the chief manifestation of thought. Looking at historical facts regarding the introduction of and implementation of English language in Nigeria, Dada (2010) asserts:

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Historically speaking, the spread of English language in Nigeria is correlated with the spread of Christianity and Western Education. After independence, English remained a colonial legacy, graduating from its use as language of administration to the rank of the most prestigious and the most widely used language in the country. Today, the English language in Nigeria functionally outweighs all of the country's indigenous languages. Its functions include that of a national language, an official language, a lingua franca plus its use in mass media, commerce, religion and education (p. 431).

The national Policy on Education (2004) stipulates English language as the language of communication in examinations. It is thus given a special position in schools. It is usually preserved as a means of expression in and out of school, students, therefore need an adequate knowledge of spoken and written English as a necessary pre-contents of the subjects taught them. English language is an indispensable second language and is also the language of formal education, the language of administration, the language of national communication and has been a medium of instruction since its introduction by the missionaries in the nineteenth century. Language is seen not only as an instrument for communication among human races but also an instrument that dissects scientific problems and the vehicle for transformation of scientific concepts. Indeed, English language fills a huge communication gap among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. It helps to facilitate contact among Nigerians of diverse language backgrounds. It is the official language of the country the language of official transaction. It is the language of commerce trade and a means of national and international communications (Obasi, 1995).

At any rate, English is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn. While there are many rules in the English language about how words are pronounced, there are also quite a few exceptions and areas where particular rules do not apply. Understanding these tricky areas will help to be more sensitive to the plight of L2 learners of English. To achieve this aim, the incorporation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) becomes necessary in teaching and learning of the English as a second language.

Humans use language for communication, in various forms, and for many purposes, we are living in a networked society in which information and communication technology (ICT) are used in many situations, fields, and contexts, to facilitate language learning, including the first and the second languages. Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is a transdisciplinary field that has been influencing human language development in various academic subjects and areas for more than half a century.

Using ICT gives the learners real life contact with, and exposure to the cultures of the peoples and countries where the second language L2 is spoken and enable them to access and research information worldwide. The opportunity for children to develop interest in the culture of other nations through comparison with their own is an integral part of language education. ICT particularly e-mail, blogs and video conferencing,

facilitates students interaction and communication with native speakers and other communities by enabling them to use language for real purposes and in real contexts.

This paper x-rays the phonological problems in teaching and learning of English as second language, highlights the numerous factors responsible and states the roles of ICT as an effective tool in solving the phonological problems. It also states some observations, recommendations and conclusion.

Concept of L1 Acquisition and L2 Learning

First language is the language spoken around a child from his birth. The child becomes immersed in the language and acquires the language unconsciously as he grows. L1 is an active constituent of a child's life since it is inseparable from his experience and social relationship. Without L1, the child cannot develop in thought or feeling (Asimonye 2009). L1 is acquired not through formal learning or teaching, though its mastery may have to be through formal teaching.

A native language is said to be acquired because of the inevitability and unconsciousness of the process. Anyanwu (2002) defined language acquisition as a process by which a child got to understand and speak the language of his society. William (1990) defined language acquisition as a process by which the rules of a language are internalized. It is a natural process not brought about by formal teaching.

Concept of L2

Second language learning takes place in a formal classroom situation. Learners may learn some aspects of the target language from the society where it is spoken widely but he still needs to be taught the language formally so as to learn the correct usage. Language learning is the act of studying or being taught the skills of a language. Encyclopedia Britannica (tenth edition) defined language learning as a process of acquiring the techniques of symbolic communication including the identification of the meanings that have been assigned to series of sounds or other symbols used in the customary linguistics orders or structures, and the acquisition of the motor skills (e.g. pronunciation, writing) necessary to use the symbol . Williams (1990) defines language learning as a process that is brought about in a setting where subject matter is selected and graded and activities are organized to promote the use of language. The rules of language are also internalized through the process of learning in instructional setting. Williams (1990) asserts that the rules were not as deeply ingrained as in the process of L1 acquisition in the natural setting outside of the classroom because of the constraints of time which limits exposure to the language. A language is learned either as a foreign language (fl) or as a second language (L2) but can be acquired as a first language (L1). The distinction between language acquisition and language learning is in the differences between the learning strategies employed by the learners. In the former, the learner (child) determines his own strategies while in the latter, the teacher imposes such strategies on him.

Causes of Phonological Problems in the Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language in Tertiary Institution

1. **Phonological Problems:** English is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn. The reason being that there are many rules in the English language about how words are pronounced. There are also quite a few exceptions and areas where particular rules do not apply. Basically, five difficult areas language and different individuals might find various parts of the phonology of English complicated – if not near impossible to grasp.

The areas that are considered to be the most complex or confusing are:

- (a) Stress and words
- (b) Vowel and consonant sounds
- (c) Combined sounds
- (d) Physical attributes
- (e) Translation between languages

Stress and words: In English, a different stress is placed on words that are spelt exactly the same; depending on the meaning the speaker wishes to create. It is not surprising therefore that a change in the stress pattern of a word may change the meaning and class of the word completely. A word which is used as a noun in one context with stress on the first syllable can be used as a verb in another context by shifting the stress to the second syllable. The shift in stress may also affect the quality of the vowel in the word. The word “conduct for instance, is pronounced /kɒndʌkt/ with stress on the first syllable when it is used as a noun. But the same word is pronounced /kəndʌkt/ with stress on the second syllable when it is used as a verb. The pitch prominence which shifts from the first syllable to the second reduces the quality of the vowel in the first syllable to the weak form represented as /ə/. Another example suffice in “record” there is a different stress based on whether we wish to refer to the noun to the verb for the actual act of registering or putting in writing a piece of information or saving a piece of music. Therefore, second language English learners cannot simply base the pronunciation of a word on what they see. They also need to learn to look for contextual clues around that word in order to pronounce it.

Vowel and Consonant Sounds

In English as a second language, learners need to distinguish between vowels and consonants. After learning these most basic letter sounds they also have to learn that these letters do not always make the same sounds. For example, the vowel “a” makes a very different sound in the word “bake” which is pronounced /beik/. Than it pronounced /beik/ than it does in the word “bark” which is pronounced /ba:k/. Also, in the word ‘apple’ /æpl/

Consonants can change a bit as well. A “t” in the word ‘tap’ which is pronounced as /tæp/ is very different in sound from a “t” in the word “them” /ðəm/.

The pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds vary with the word in which they are used.

Combined Sounds

Sometimes, when consonant comes together, the pronunciation gets confusing. A non-native speaker would see “t” and “k” and want to pronounce those sounds separately. However, they come together to create a blended sound. Another example of this is when the letters “C” and “K” come together in words as in back, rack, pack, tackle etc. The person learning English would see these letters as distinct, yet when people speak, he or she hears them as blended together into one sound which understandably can cause at least a bit of confusion.

Physical Attributes

The way in which people speak is of course, related to physical properties of the mouth region. For example, there are some words which absolutely require speakers to put both of their lips together in order to produce the sound. The letters “b” and “p” are two of such sounds which are pronounced as which are pronounced as /p/ and /b/. While it seems natural to a native speaker, those who do not know how to say these sounds have to learn these processes which are entirely common place to the English speaker who knows that /p/ is voiceless sound while /b/ is voiced and articulates them as such.

Translation between Languages

Often, when trying to learn another language one looks for a sound or word comparable in English upon which you can base your study of the word in the new language. However, this is not always possible when trying to learn English. For example, the sounds of “th” as in /θ/, /ð/ and “y” as in /j/ do not have comparable measures in some languages, Nigerians not an exception. Therefore, cannot teach these students or learners of English as a second language, these sounds by saying ‘th’ sound which has /θ/ and /ð/ sound in native language. The teacher of English as a second language may not be able to give the basis for comparison.

2. Mother Tongue Interference

Most researchers agree that the learners first language influence the pronunciation of the target language and it is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. When a child is born, he acquires the language of his immediate environment unconsciously and almost effortlessly. This language is called his first language (L1) or his mother tongue. As the child grows and comes in contact with another language, there is every tendency of transfer of some of the features of the L1 or the mother tongue (MT) to the learning of the second language (L2). Crystal (1997) reveals that the properties of the first language are thought to exercise some influence on the course of learning a second language. Lado (1957) lends credence to this revelation when he posits that learners tend to transfer the meaning and forms of their native language and culture to the foreign language. This, by implication means that learners transfer the knowledge of their previous language into the new language. This, superimposition is very obvious at phonological level of a second language learners pronunciation of some English words. For example, he pronounces words like “bird” and “bed” the same way ‘Bird’ – a creature with wings and features that can usually fly which is pronounced as /bɜ:d/ by

the native speakers' of English language is erroneously being pronounced by the learner of English as a second language as "bed" a piece of furniture that you sleep on which is pronounced as /bed/ by the native speakers.

So called interference from first language is likely to cause errors in stress and intonation in the target language. Some students in higher institutions tend to have difficulty with English sounds because they are deeply influenced in their L1.

Language Immersion

An enduring issue in immersion of language focuses on the appropriate use of the L1 in the one-way or two ways native – language immersion is not submersion, a method that compels students to learn a second language at the expense of their mother tongue. First language immersion is voluntary; parents often participate in immersion themselves to support their children's language learning at home. L1 immersion is additive, building on students first language abilities as a foundation for learning the second language. It is a full-day or most of the day teaching and learning in the native language, often complemented by after – school and systematically incorporates native culture content and cultural appropriate ways of teaching and learning.

Most importantly, native language immersion not only engage students in learning the native language but also mathematics, science, social studies, music, art and even English. In other words, native language immersion is a whole program that cultivates what language researcher Fred Genesee calls "the whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community". Most researchers agree that the learner's first language influences the pronunciation of the second language.

Learners' Attitude

Attitude towards the target language learning influences achievement in pronunciation. It is not common to find that quite a few students resist coordination with teachers in phonetics classes. Sometimes some other students pronounce separate phoneme wrongly and these students laughed at them. That needs a correct attitude to learn English pronunciation. A number of researchers have claimed that work on pronunciation should need to be tied in with on the individuals value set, attitudes and socio-schemata (Pennington, 1994). Sometimes motivation for learning can accelerate the learners' attitude formation. Attitude for learning can either support or hinder pronunciation skills development. Similarly, the way an individual pronounces word has much to do with his or her personality and psychological or emotional state at a given time. Action (1984) sees "preparing students psychologically as a necessary correlate to improving their pronunciation phonology, he says, has both 'inside - out' and 'outside-in' dimension which function in a kind of loop. 'Not only does personality or emotional state shows in pronunciation but conversely it is also true. Speakers can either control their nerves or inner states by speaking properly. Prior experience; with pronunciation instruction may influence learners success. Some students, failed to pronounce some words correctly from the beginning. As they become version of pronunciation they would be more likely to miscomprehend when these words are not correctly

pronounced. It is also worthy of noticing that the most often misunderstood words are those pronounced similarly. Such as sheep, ship; pot, port; sit, seat etc.

ICT in Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language

The Nigeria National Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy of Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012) envisions Nigeria as a knowledge based and globally competitive, society whose mission is to fully integrate information and communication technologies into the socio-economic development and transformation of Nigeria into knowledge based economy. Effective ICT-based teaching and learning in our educational institutions would help fulfill this vision. When the meaning of ICT and its unlimited offer to education are understood, then this rapidly changing technology would not be seen as overwhelming issues but more critical thinking and problem solving in education. According to Branford, J., Brown, .A.L and Cooking, R.R (2000), several studies have reviewed literatures on ICT and learning and have concluded that it has great potential to enhance student's achievement and teachers learning.

In view of Moursund (2005), information accessed through digital technologies can promote innovation, increase productivity and enrich the quality of lives, adding that application of ICT in education is broad deep and a rapidly growing field of study and has the potential to contribute to sustainable improvement in the educational system.

Humans use language for communication, in various forms and for many purposes. We are living in a networked society in which information and communication technologies (ICT) are used in many situations, fields, and contexts to facilitate language learning, including the first and second languages. Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is a trans-disciplinary field that has been influencing human language development in various academic subjects and areas for more than half a century. Since 1990s, ICT enabled language learning has been the most widely used form of (TELL).

ICT is often argued to increase motivation and is frequently linked with learners' autonomy. Autonomy asserts by Williams (2003) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". Learning the English language through ICT offers a broad survey of language learning process through computer technologies. Advances in computer and communication technologies enable us to store process and transmit huge amount of information easily and quickly. Due to development in networking technologies, today's world has become more inter-connected.

The Role of ICT in Teaching and Learning of English

ICT is a new branch of knowledge that has been vastly influencing the field of education. As we have to face the technology century, due to the influence of advancement in the field of science and technology on the varied aspects of life, it results in its modernization. ICT today is playing a vital role in improving the quality of education in any country, where it is appropriately and effectively used. It is vastly influencing the media systems, micro-teaching, strategies of Distance learning with reference to television, radio, computer, mobile phones etc. ICT offers solutions to

address the shortcomings of the traditional classroom. One of the great benefits of ICT in teaching is that they can improve the quality and the quantity of educational provision. ICT enhances teaching and learning in tertiary institutions. Zepp, R.A (2005) and Astin (1999) reveals a significant increase in learning ability of ICT taught students over the non ICT taught students.

ICT speeds up language learning process by offering opportunity for learners of the English language to practice outside the classroom. ICT provides the English language learners and the teachers a relatively safe environment and also a strongly realistic use of language. ICT has positively impacted the learning of language. Braimoh (2008) asserts that computers have made possible high-speed data processing and solution to complex statistical problems in offices, schools, and organizations. The ICT facilities for learning English language include: internet, teleconferencing, the E-mail and VRC.

Internet is a worldwide computer network that provides information on very many subjects and enables users to exchange messages. It enables all types of computers to share services and communication directly. Awake (1997) asserts that through internet, a user shares information transfer files and sends messages. Internet makes it possible for information to flow through any different interconnected computer networks.

Teleconferencing: Teleconferencing is an activity where users converse with others in real time, speaking through the screen. If the PC has a webcam, the speakers can see themselves when they communicate. Through teleconferencing, group of users from different continent are linked together.

The E-mail: The e-mail facility enables two or more persons to communicate by writing through computer. Pulliant (1989) states that “a letter or a memo from one person is typed into a computer which is sent to another via telephone and stored until the receiver asks for it”.

VRC (Voice Recognition Computer): This is a type of computer that is capable of recognizing human voice into sensible form. This type of device makes the learning of phonetics and phonology of the English language easier.

Conclusions

ICT has made important, ground-breaking strides in the academic and business worlds. Modern day innovation is the use of digital devices as an extension of educational process. We must realize that talking about use and development of ICT services in the public life, not only in education, depends on the user’s ability to actually use these contemporary services. The fact remains that developing services that remain without users seems rather senseless unless we provides a shift in ICT competence for the potential users. But this again is not possible without the required infrastructural support, which at least in terms of accessibility should not present a serious obstacle to the English language learning today. Pamela (2006) emphasizes on the importance of feedback in teaching and learning in the electronic media because helpful feedback given to learners means creating social presence which is crucial in learning. Teacher must also be prepared to go through a continuous learning process in English language

pronunciation and other drills via ICT facilities to improve teaching efficiency. This is because technology cannot replace good teaching but it can enhance it.

A vast amount of literature explored the potentialities of ICT with regard to teaching and learning languages. The possibilities of computer technology as a tool could include increasing language learners' self esteem, vocational preparedness, language proficiency and overall academic skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enhance the role of ICT in curbing the phonological problems of the teaching and learning of the English language:

1. The higher institutions in Nigeria should invest more in classroom educational tools i.e. ICT teaching and learning tools.
2. The instructors' teachers or lecturers should be trained on the use of these ICT facilities
3. Practical ICT education should be integrated into school curriculum.
4. Students should be encouraged to use ICT tools in their studies, examinations and submission of assignments.

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