

IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS VIA ICT

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Abstract

English language as a language of education industry cannot be improved in its teaching methodologies without reflecting the impact of present information and communication technology in Nigeria. Learners of English language in this era of technology have to be taught English in a modern way, by expanding their horizons on how to access information on the Internet. This paper examined and highlighted various means in which learners of the English language can improve their proficiency level in the subject under discourse. Nigerian secondary schools have not been adequately equipped with computer gadgets that would attract the attentions of both teachers and students to embrace the full application of computer in the classroom setting. Thereupon, the paper examined and outlines some aims of introducing information and communication technology in teaching English language at the post-primary school level. Certainly, vocabulary of the English learners can be improved via information and communication technology (ICT).

The importance of English language cannot be denied in the cultural and social setting of Nigeria. A Nigerian student needs good reading, writing and oral skills pertaining to English language in order to fit into the local and global market. In order to meet the growing demands for good English language teachers and language training institutions, a new English language teaching methodology need to be introduced via Information and Communication Technology tools in the classroom.

When language teachers decide to exploit the potentials of information and

communication technology, they have to do this by inserting this practice into a more comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework, which in every movement and in every step of their work, can make clear the didactic reasons and the purpose of language teaching. The Internet is a tool, which has great potential in the English language classroom, but its effectiveness in practice depends to a large extent on the way it is exploited by teachers and students (Wideatt, Hardisty, Costment, 2000).

It has to be kept in mind that language learning is already effectively promoted with traditional materials. If they are used inside well-planned activities/lessons/units/modules that are designed with a precise awareness of the students needs, their learning paths and underlying approaches. The revolution that new media such as multimedia computers and the Internet in particular can bring to English teaching is that they dramatically enlarge the repertoire of educational tools, their possibilities, and their combinations. They allow teachers and learners to extend their access both to educational resources and to resource in general that can be used as educational materials, to make everything visible and so more comprehensible to help analyze and organize information to get in touch with different types of media texts, styles and registers so improving language understanding and producing. Thereby information and communication technology gives teachers and students the possibility to communicate and to promote collaboration, leading to the creation, production and publication of personalized and original work (Francis, 1978).

This is the new frontier that language teachers can explore and creatively exploit in order to offer their students the possibility to use a new language to learn and communicate as English is the language of online communication they only improve their command of the language but also use the language to study other subjects that they find interesting from the aspect of the content.

Aims of Introducing ICT in English Language Teaching

The introduction of information and communication technology in Nigerian secondary schools is to meet the present day technological quest in all spheres of life. The question of whether Nigeria needs information technology may appear too simplistic and unnecessary. It was observed that the chalkboard and textbooks continue to dominate classroom activities in most secondary school in Nigeria. If other countries in Africa such as Uganda, Ghana which have less to help secondary school students to become information and technology experts, why is Nigeria lagging behind? Hence the use of ICT will help the user. To build a learning environment in which teachers and learners can create contexts for real communication inside and outside the classroom.

1. To present the English language as a means to learning and communicate about content.
2. To transform the realism of the contexts created in class simulations into reality.
3. To break school isolation.
4. To establish new relationships between school and society
5. To establish new relationships between school and youth languages (Venice, 1997 and Seymour, 2010).

“ I think the strongest way we can do that is by creating situations within schools where children pursue with their own passion from their hearts. They pursue projects that they

are really interested in; they find out by getting the information they need from the Internet. They work with one another, they do something difficult, the teacher acts as a counsellor, as a guide, so the teacher has to get used to the idea of respecting the children as learners of recognizing that they create their own knowledge, that the old ambition that many educators have had that children can learn by doing experimentally in a way that is really meaningful for them, can finally be realized. So this is not about what technology does to learning. It is about old well-established ideas of how we would like children to learn and technology makes possible to make these dreams of the past educators come true (Seymour, 2010).

There is a strict interconnection between the use of technologies, learning theories and teaching models. The role of computer in teaching has changed in time, following the development of the theoretical models of the learning processes and can be different today in accordance with the learning theory and the methods a teacher practices.

Improving English Language Skills and ICT

One area of difficulty for Nigerian students is the technology of the English language. Different programmes in the computer can be used to teach oral English for instance, the Microsoft word office 2003 can be used to teach the speech sounds of English and prosody. This can be done by connecting a telephone to the computer and turning on Microsoft word clicking the tools' menu to select speech input on the telephone, which will show on the task bar. This mechanism has speech, voice and correction commands. If the speech commands is activated, the teacher/learners can speak and write sentences without the use of the keyboard. The voice command indicates what to save, close or delete from the system while the correction command is used to correct mistakes. The mouse is used to select the correct options. This

programme is adequate for the teaching of English language pronunciation because it can indicate both right and wrong pronunciations. For instance, if a learner pronounces words correctly, the computer will write them correctly but if the pronunciation is wrong the system will show a wrong word. Indeed, this system is effective in teaching pronunciation and spelling simultaneously (Otagburuagu and Eze, 2009).

However, the power point programme facilitates the teaching of English pronunciation also. There is a voice recorder under the insert menu bar, which can be activated for a dialogue box. It can record audio, save and package it to CDs. The package can be burned into many cassettes, discs and diskettes, which can be distributed to students for use at their convenience.

Microsoft Internet explorer can be used to teach oral English. It is designed to enhance oral communication. As a tool for teaching oral English, the user has to be registered before he can operate it. A registered member can choose a room known as directory, which contains education technology, single adult, and sports etc as sub-rooms. Therefore, registered members can interact with one another by either typing and talking usually called instant messaging. In order to explore the Internet, the user has to go to yahoo messenger and enter his registered address. A blank page is provided for typing instant messages. There is a talk speech/device that enables the members to communicate irrespective of any phonological interference that may occur.

Teaching Vocabulary through ICT

The oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary software performs speaking function. When you type a word, and click on it, the dictionary will pronounce the word. It has American and British English pronunciation. This function helps in pronunciation and other dictionary functions. This software can be got

from www.gutenberg.com Encarta. Indeed, the potentials of ICT in ESL pedagogy are enormous.

Several investigations have been made on teaching and learning processes involving the use of the ICT. In their paper, "making creative use of the internet" Barlett and Schnei (2002: 19) posited that the system has the potential for the dissemination of research results, location of papers delivered in conferences, among other things. They contend that the activities of the Internet can be divided into four overlapping and complementary realms: two-way communication, conducting research, disseminating information and publication. These are necessary aspects of Nigeria English language teaching and learning.

Again, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) enables people to carry out text-based live conferences or chat as Barlett and Schnei (2002) noted. For instance, aspects of English grammar, reading, comprehension, dialogue etc can be taught in this way.

There is no doubt that the ICT contains enormous data bank for researchers. While library catalogues may reference materials, which are out-dated, the worldwide web can be used for current reference materials via research engines. According to Barlett and Schnei (2002), the worldwide web provides the media for exploration. Research engines help those who embark on research on the different aspects of the language to locate vital references or bibliographical tools and relevant data. ICT has facilities, which can promote the teaching of English online. ICT also offers opportunities for the recruitment of the best ELT staff across the globe. In the area of testing and evaluation, ICT provides excellent facilities (Rogers, 2010).

The Teaching of the English Language in Nigerian Secondary Schools

In available literature, education experts such as Parrant (1971), Fafunwa (1996)

contended that “teaching is not just mere telling; it involves telling what, telling how, telling where and telling when”. Language teaching is a far more complex process than the teaching of theoretical subjects. It involves not only the teaching of linguistic forms but also the teaching of their communicative uses. The extent of telling in language teaching and learning is therefore quite complex. This is more so when it involves a second language as in the case of the English language in Nigeria (Otagburuagu, 2002).

However, Obanya and Uba (1987) note that;

“The second language learner does not have the natural native environment to learn the language. The knowledge he gains is from the teacher in a formal setting...”

The idea in this observation is the fact that the teacher’s competence sets the limit of learner proficiency in language learning in the absence of such electronically driven mechanisms such as the ICT scholars such as Bright and McGregor (1970), Francis (1978), Oyetunji (1971) argue that the students of English language are not taught with appropriate materials and that errors occur as a result of the fact that the teaching of English in schools is made too abstract and mechanical to profit the students. Rogers (2010) on his own part advocates full exposure to a wide range of learning experiences in the target language in order to avoid the occurrence of illegitimate extensions, which could arise from restricted experience. Multi-dimensional aids such as ICT can provide a broad experience for learners. Enuesike (2009) in his study of the attitude of Nigerian students towards the use of the media in English language instruction found out that most learners are often not positively disposed towards the use of the media in language teaching because they consider such exposure a waste of time.

In recent case studies on the use of the ICT in learning published by the British Education Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) in April 2005, it was discovered that networked technologies are fast becoming a feature of pupils’ and students’ education in England. But can the same be said of the Nigerian pupils’ and students? Your guess here is as good as mine.

The researchers state at this point and without any fear of controversy that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) made its entry into the Nigerian educational scene not too long ago as a Euro-American technology to be observed and experimented with. Later, it relieved approval as a policy matter to be learnt, adopted and utilized in the educational process. ICT is still in its embryonic stages as an instructional mechanism in the education sector. Indeed its advantages and potentials in ESL pedagogy are yet to be fully known and exploited.

Challenges of Using ICT in English Language Teaching

Several challenges face the use of ICT in English language instruction in Nigerian secondary schools. First is the challenge of high rate of computer illiteracy among the English Language Teachers (ELT). Computer literacy is still very low among the teachers. Computer awareness is a new dawn and therefore the extent to which it can be used in teaching and learning is limited. Next is the fact that most secondary schools have not acquired enough computer units for instructional purposes. Majority of the secondary schools do not yet have Internet services to make ICT functional as an instrument for English language teaching and learning.

It is common knowledge that people often show strong aversion for change. Even if the facilities were provided abundantly, there is

no guarantee that they will be effectively utilized.

Furthermore, most of the students are not computer literate. ICT assisted English language instruction will demand a measure of computer literacy and awareness by the students. There are also challenges related to the nature of ICT as a system in itself. For example due to contradictions in programming language in computer, when an American man writes a computer program language using American English, the computer will execute it, but if a British man also writes a computer program language using British English, the computer will also execute it. Having gone through nitty-gritty of the genesis of the bedrock of language learning through the computer system, the scholars discovered that many people have formed the habit of exploring the concept of pornography as well as E-mail extractor, forgery and all sorts of fraudulent acts. Pornography as an Internet fraud is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of our society and had adverse effects on both adults and children (Chime, 2004).

E-mail extractor and forgery pose great dangers to the ICT world and can also be a great distraction to English language learners who are exposed to the medium. Many people indulge in the use of the computer to forge results. The internet has reduced the volume of foreign English language books in markets because most of the texts are available in websites and only those who can pay for air time and have the necessary expertise can access them. Besides, the ICT as a means of English language teaching is also limited by the fact that the system can only give out whatever is fed into it.

In Nigeria, greater limitations are placed on its use by poverty; high illiteracy rate and erratic power supply coupled with the reluctance of the ELT practitioners to embrace change.

There is no doubt that ICT is recognized as a powerful educational resource, which is not only limited to communication outside the classroom. Apart from being an informed teaching media, the Internet for instance, is encouraged in classroom activities. Students are encouraged to check research references online, submit assignments online and even check their results online. As the use of the Internet is spreading across the globe, scholars have been identifying the advantages of encouraging its use. Some of the views are that ICT:

- a. Increases opportunities for collaborative writing
- b. It reduces intimidation factor and improves students attitude towards writing.
- c. It provides learning impaired people an opportunity to communicate without calling attention to their disability
- d. It encourages people to build and maintain social relationships.
- e. It makes communication cheaper and faster
- f. It encourages creativity in language use etc (see Kupelian, 2001, Leibowitz, 1999, Reid and Reid, 2004).

Halliday (1990) observed that:

“When demands are made for language... when we are making language work for us in a way it never had to do before, it will become a different language in order to cope (p.82).”

The above idea points the picture of what ICT has done to English in the global era. Computer-based media have placed new demands on language, which promote variation in its use. One major task the Internet and mobile communication has given to English is that it makes composing in the language more elastic and less rule-governed. Ellipsis, abbreviation and colloquialism are common features of e-mail language and text messages. Students, who frequently interact with their friends through these media, as indicated in this study may likely

bring some feature of the language use to formal classroom writing. Since text writing takes less time to learn, it is naturally attractive to learners and once they use it frequently, it becomes their second nature in learning. There is the tendency to unconsciously use it even in the wrong contexts as some students do in their answers to examination questions.

That is not all; another major challenge of the ICT to learners of English is that of coping with the learning of the new vocabulary that is emerging. It is assumed that students will naturally learn these words, as they get familiar with electronic communication media. More importantly is the way some existing words in English are acquiring new contextual meanings, resulting in polysemy (several meanings of the same word). For example, the word 'comprehension' has different meanings in the usage of English and philosophy.

Another area of interest is the grammar and spelling check package makes the computer look like a sufficient tool for language use. It enables users to proof-read and edit their writing. There is no doubt that the computer helps a great deal in language processing. The more conversant a user is with the computer, the more he learns to use the various programmes it offers. It has however been observed, "Text producers should be cautioned in following the computer's linguistic compass without circumspection" (Fakoya, 2004). Since the software is programmed, i.e. cannot accept certain linguistic elements even though they are correctly used. For instance, the computer rejects some passive structures and certain punctuations. Over-dependence on computer's linguistics guide may lead users away from the acceptable grammatical structure.

Recommendations

For proper improvement in the use of ICT in English language teaching in Nigerian

secondary schools, immediate attention must be given to the following areas:

1. Computer should be made one of the core subjects even from the primary school level to tertiary level. This is to enable the learners' get the necessary skills involved in computer learning.
2. Nigerian government in collaboration with the federal ministry of education must provide sufficient ICT facilities in all secondary schools in the country.
3. English language teachers should be given adequate training programme in computer to enable them fit in and adapt to the modern system of teaching the language.
4. Staff must be encouraged to change their traditional orientation of theory based language teaching to a more pragmatic, communicatively oriented methodology.
5. Adequate attention should be given to the variant nature of British and American spellings and phonology while using ICT as an aid in English language teaching.
6. In the area of testing and result publication through the ICT mechanism, close monitoring must be done to avoid possible faking or forgery of any sort.
7. English teachers in Nigeria should also stress that the official and formally accepted written form of English is the British variety. In doing this, the features of the British and American English such as vocabulary, spelling and structure should be discussed in class in order to familiarize the students with the acceptable form.
8. It is important that the vocabulary of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) be taught in the English classroom to familiarize the learners with it. Students may be asked to list some of these new words and the old ones used for other meanings in the context of computer language find their meanings and use them in the appropriate

contexts. This will introduce the learners to consciously learn the register of CMC.

In conclusion however, it is important to reiterate that information and communication technology (ICT) can help to bring about improvement in English language teaching and learning if the teachers as ELT practitioners are willing to embrace it and integrate it as part of their pedagogical principles in the context of the global educational environment in which they find themselves.

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