

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AS IT RELATES TO COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILL ACQUISITION

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) refers to technologies that are used to collect, store, edit and pass on information in various forms. It covers both old and new technologies used for handling information. This paper examines how the communicative language skills could better be taught in tertiary institutions using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Sustainable National Development. The paper is of the view that communicative language skills can only be taught effectively and efficiently via the various facilities provided by the ICT. And this can be possible only through adequate provisions of the ICT facilities by the authorities concerned as well as the degree of commitment on the part of teachers and students in the pursuit of educational goals.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been recognized recently as a tool of knowledge that is imperative for growth and development. Consequently, many countries now regard understanding and mastering of basic ICT skills as part of the core education component, alongside reading, writing and numeracy. There is also the pervasive or dominant influence of ICT on all aspects of human activity – commerce, governance, industry, aviation, communication, education among others. Nwogu (2007) stated that irrespective of the one's location on the globe, ICT and its diverse applications cannot be ignored. This according to him implies that:

1. ICT has become an inevitable, indispensable and inescapable application in virtually every aspect of human endeavour.

2. Any professional who tries to ignore, evade or even delay the application of ICT in his/her practice is guilty of including in a behaviour that is professionally risky.
3. ICT poses a major challenge to managers of the education system in general.

Alakulehin (2007) gave an expanded definition of ICT in relation to the learning process. According to him, ICT refers to the range of technologies that are applied in the process of extracting, collecting, storing, editing, retrieving and transfer of information in various forms. This definition indicates that various electronic equipments such as iPods, mobile telephone, MP3/MP4/DVD storage devices, file transfer protocols, digital satellite receivers and transmitters, the world-wide-web as well as the computers are ICT products; and they are used for information exchange. The application of these products to the process of teaching and learning gave rise to the concept of the multimedia approach, which is the use of sound, pictures and films to enhance the learning process.

The Nigerian government in her aim to enhance ICT development in the country established in April, 2001, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). Its major objective is to make Nigeria an information technology capable to state and using IT as a tool for sustainable development as well as global competitiveness. It therefore became apparent, that the country needed to shift emphasis from the knowledge oriented education to one that would empower the human potencies

for productive enterprise and functional living. In view of this paradigm shift from a traditional knowledge oriented education to a skill-oriented education across all levels of education – basic, secondary and tertiary that ICT could not be ignored.

Obioma (2007) outlined the components of the education sector reforms that will make the recipients skill oriented. These according to him include:

1. Synchronizing the contents and delivery processes of education with the major strategic goals of the National Economic and Development Strategy (NEEDS).
2. Re-alignment of both the content and structure of Basic Education Curriculum (BEC).
3. Inclusion of new subjects in Basic Education Curriculum.
4. Re-structuring of the Secondary Education Curriculum (SEC).
5. Establishment of the post-basic Vocational Enterprise Institutes (VEIs) and
6. Establishment of post-secondary Innovative Enterprise Institutes (IEIs).

In the light of the foregoing, there is no doubt that ICT has tremendous potentials for effective implementation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. However, the realization of these potentials appears to be contingent on how we approach the major concomitant challenges facing the application of ICT in Nigeria (Nworgu, 2007). These challenges according to Nworgu (2007) include:

1. Lack of readiness which refers to the lack of technological infrastructure, legal, institutional and human resources as well as political will.
2. The design-reality gaps that arises mainly due to the lack of assessment of

needs prior to the implementation of projects.

3. Cost of ICT infrastructures, facilities and services in quite prohibitive.
4. Inertia that refers to a negative attitudinal disposition towards resisting change.
5. Inequality in ICT provision and Access; this entails the gap between the access ICT by the poor and the rich or the urban and rural dwellers.

He concluded that the reforms in the education sector can only be achieved when the above challenge are countered.

English Language in Nigeria has maintained its place and status as the Second and Official language. In other words, it is the language of administration, the medium of instruction at all levels of education and a vehicle for social interaction that cut across tribes, culture and religion in a multi-lingual country such as ours. The history and development of language teaching in Nigeria has witnessed great changes and improvement towards better achievements of goals. There is hardly any one single method of language teaching that adequately accommodates all the techniques and skills of language teaching. Sherwin (1961) puts it that no single teaching method has yet proved its superiority over all others.

This explains the attempt over the years in the employment of various methods of language teaching which include: the audio-lingual method, the structural approach method, the oral approach, the communicative competence (com. com. method) among others. Today, with the rapid technological development and the benefit of globalization, a new trend has emerged: the Information Communication Technology (ICT). This is veritable vehicle in the teaching of the communicative skills in language teaching.

The Communicative Language Skills

Language is learnt and used via the use of the four recognized basic language skills. They include the listening skill, the speaking skill, the reading skill and the writing skill. The first and second are the most important at the early stage as well as in later life. Learners need to listen, to pay attention, to concentrate and to her learning materials. The need to follow the trend of discussion, listen to lectures, follow instructions and directives are all vital in the learning process. Speaking seek clarification, asking questions and contributing to academic discussions in a meaningful way. Ideas must be framed to express the mind clearly. Learners are encouraged in group discussions and interactive sessions. While reading skill calls for training to become efficient readers and to apply the different type of readings for specific learning objectives. Reading difficulties are identified and efforts made to correct them. Learners are able to recognize topic sentences, details, headlines, subsections, introduction, conclusions, etc. Writing skill should focus on the different types of writing and each with its own format: Essays, letters, memos, reports notes, circulars, etc. Ideas organized logically, sequentially and coherently.

Practical Application of ICT in the Teaching of Language Skills

Abdulkadir (2004) and Yusuf, (2004) opined that ICT can be effectively utilized in language laboratory operation for the purpose of communicative language teaching. They suggest that the laboratory should be by nature computer-based and aided, particularly the multi-media laboratory. The language laboratory provides computers as well as other electronic gadgets like audio, video, phone lines and satellite dishes. These facilities provide both teachers and learners the opportunity to use computer based technology

in the teaching and learning of the four language skills.

Yusuf (2004) noted that there are other computer aided program that can facilitate communicative language teaching some of these include the following:

- (a) **Interactive Audio:** This is a program that provides the facilities to teach and test active listening skills. Digital audio capacity in the laboratory with personal computer, microphones for input and head phones for output are all employed in this program.
- (b) **Interactive Video:** This is a system in which video is compressed into a disc for use on computer with instant access for sound vision and text which in turn produces an interactive system. This system provides adequate practice input, access to segments is faster and the written material is provided on screen.
- (c) **Computer and Networks:** This is an assisted instructional program that aids reading and writing skills in the target language. Either an individual or a group of students in the language laboratory can operate this program in a given learning task. Real life communication between groups could be done and the responses read and replies given in writing. Students are aided with basic word processing program to enable them write correctly thereby improving their writing efficiency.
- (d) **Video Animations:** Walleys (1992) refers to this as visual component which is very useful in training in cultural and paralinguistic information. Such a program enables students to observe the dress, food, climate and gestures of the culture of the target language. As the

saying goes, “French is better learned with its culture”.

- (e) **Satellite Broadcast:** This is captured using satellite dishes and transferred into the language laboratory. Such broadcast is video-taped for class viewing and a computer can be accessed to generate characters for the program.
- (f) **Local Area Network (LAN):** This provides the opportunity for share software and accessories like printers, scanners, etc it enables both teacher and learners to interact with each other in a learning situation.
- (g) **Long Distance Network or Wide Area Network (WAN):** This facility provides opportunity for users to link up with the internet Language Laboratory. With effective telecommunication software, learners can communicate directly with people from other parts of the world directly and in different languages.

The above programs and activities which are the fruits of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) remain a land mark in the teaching of the communicate language skills.

Conclusion

The paper has so far made an attempt to identify the telecommunication based equipment under Information Communication Technology and its relevance in the teaching of communicative language laboratory with a Computer Aided Instruction (CAI) programs which enhance communicative competence of learners. Communicative language skills learning become not only practical, but interactive, self monitoring, self testing,

interesting and above all more efficient. The challenge to both teachers and learners especially in our tertiary institutions is to strive for competence and proficiencies in communicative language skills and adequately utilize the benefits of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in this regard.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- (a) Tertiary institutions in Nigeria and indeed all higher educational institutions should endeavour to equip their institutions with the relevant ICT facilities in the teaching of the communicative language skills.
- (b) Language laboratories should be established and adequately equipped where they are lacking or ill-equipped.
- (c) Competent teachers who can effectively handle such equipment should be employed and existing teachers re-trained in this regard.
- (d) Language and communication teachers should be up-to-date with modern technology and show the desired commitment and interest in the use of ICT facilities.
- (e) Students as well should develop the interest and show commitment in the use of ICT facilities so as to derive the maximum benefit from such facilities.

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