MAXIMIZING THE PIVOTAL ROLES OF ICT IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A NEW HORIZON IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education has shifted from the traditional, behaviorist approaches towards more construction ones. These days, the prevalent view is that learning has to be authentic, realistic, user-initiated and that learners have to be able to work independently from their teacher who is a coach rather than an instructor. The complexity and open nature of such task-based, holistic, student initiated activities present practical problems for defining specific language learning goals, for effective support in the learning process and for a flexible assessment and evaluation of the knowledge and skills of the students. This paper focuses on maximizing the pivotal roles of ICT in second language education. In view of the above, it is important that teachers and learners in second language embrace ICT which will pave way for quality education.

Keywords: Maximizing, Roles, Pivotal, Language, Education, Horizon.

According to the constructivist Learning Theory, learning involves language, the language we use influences learning. On the empirical level, researches have noted that people talk to themselves as they learn.

ICT is an acronym that stands for information and communications technology or technologies. It is an important, broad and fast changing subject. ICT is Today seen everywhere particularly in education. Information and communication technology is the catch-all-phrase that is concerned with gathering, storing, manipulating, retrieving, transmitting or receiving of digital data. It includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer, computer net work hardware and software, satellite systems and so on as well as the various services and application associated with them such as video and conferencing and distance learning.

Across the past twenty-nine years, the use of information and communication technology has fundamentally changed the practices and procedures of nearly all forms of endeavours. Within business, governance, engineering, architecture, medicine, education and educational related matters. In the field of language education, ICT has begun to have impact in the field of language education, but the impact has not been adequately felt due to some constraints and challenges. But with the world moving rapidly into digital media and information, the role of ICT in language education is becoming more and more important and that importance will continue to grow and develop in this 21st Century and beyond.

Moreover, the field of language education has been unaffected by the penetrating influence of ICT. Undoubtedly, ICT can enhance teaching and learning of language through its dynamic, interactive content and it can provide real opportunities for individualized instruction. ICT has the potential to accelerated, enrich and deepen language skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing, motivate and engage students in language learning.

According to Davis and Tearl (1999), ICT helps to relate school experience to work places, helps to create economic viability for tomorrow’s workers, contributes to radical changes in school, strengthens teaching and provides opportunities for connection between the school and the world. Azikiwe (1998) posits that ICT can make the school more efficient and productive, thereby engendering a variety of tools to facilitate and enhance the teacher’s profession activities.
Language Education

Language Education is the process of learning a language as well as the teaching of the said language. It may refer to either learning a native language for the first time or learning second or additional language beyond one’s mother tongue.

Language education which is a socially oriented activity and disciplines involves trained teachers and learners. Quality language education has traditionally been associated with strong teachers having high degree of personal contact with learners.

Language education is embedded in the Applied Linguistic, which is seen as an autonomous, problem-solving discipline, concerned broadly with language Education and language policies (MC Donough 2002:11).

ICT Tools for Language Learning

ICT tools for language learning include audio devices, visual devices and multimedia devices. Since electro-hardware devices cannot function without the appropriate software, software then becomes the pivot of any functional hardware and thus is of utmost significance of ICT development.

Importance of ICT in Language Teaching and Learning

In recent decade, information and communication technology has provided benefits to the community with large areas of new communications capabilities. Information and communications Technology (ICT) is part of so many aspects of our daily lives and the key for much innovation, including significant tools like computer, hand phones etc.

ICT covers all forms of computer and communications equipment and software used to create, design, store, transit, interpret and manipulate information in its various formats. Personal computers, laptops, tablets, mobile phones, transport systems, televisions and network technologies are just some examples of the diverse array of ICT tools. According to the European Commission, the importance of ICT lies less in the technology itself than in its ability to create greater access to information and communication in undeserved population.

ICT and language teaching have walked hand to hand for a long time and contributed as teaching tools in the language and second language classroom. ICT have intrinsic features that make its use a valuable source of input but, sometimes teachers may distrust technology or just be reluctant to include computer activities in their classrooms. According to Ogugua (2004), the benefits of the use of ICT in language learning include:

1. Through ICT, images can easily be used in teaching and improving the retentive memory of students.
2. Through ICT, teachers can easily explain complex instructions and ensure students comprehension.
3. Through ICT, teachers are able to create interactive classes and make the lessons more enjoyable, which could improve student attendance and concentration.
4. ICT can speed up the language learning process by offering additional opportunities for practice outside the classroom.
5. Real life learning reality of virtuality. There is little doubt that language teachers need to focus on the use of language and ICT make it easy for us to do so, especially after the use of internet as a didactic tool. Bringing a sense of reality also contributes to facilitate learners to be less dependent, fostering their autonomy. This has created intense demand on the teacher to be selective and to adapt the wide variety of resources at hand to the variety of students.
6. Meaningful Learning: through the use of ICT, teachers can demonstrate that it provides the material in real life. Students get a clear visualization of the material being taught.
7. Teachers will certainly find teaching tips and strategies that may enhance and improve their teaching.

Enhancing ICT in Language Education

Education when looked at from a much more comprehensive angle seeks to refine an individual in a way to set him free from the clutches of vulgarity, crudity and ignorance; it eases, facilitates and smoothens the process of actualizing and optimizing the full potential which an individual is naturally endowed with. When properly structured and organized, education results in a
holistic positive change in man. Most often, this change envisaged through whatever education ranging from attitudinal change, a change in orientation and beliefs, a change in ideas and perceptive to change in an individual’s approach to problem solving. Put differently, it is a total overhauling of such an individual in a view to sharpening his interaction with his environment through the newly acquired skills. The ultimate goal of education therefore is to shake, shape and change the receiver. Babalola (2004), quoting Frunk and Wagnal throws more light when she writes thus:

*Education is the development of the whole nature of man, physical, intellectual and moral through interaction with every phase of his environment. More specifically, it denotes the deliberate methods of training and direction used by a society to inculcate its ideals of life and culture in its maturing members and thus perpetuate itself.*

In this twenty-first century, we are all living in the age of digital technology, information and communication technology (ICT) as a force that has changed many aspects of the way we live. ICT has been used world-wide to help people such as business, trade, marketing, science, education and others (Brian 2000). Now ICT is currently being used in education to assist students to learn more effectively and help teachers to do administrative task more efficiently (Neil Selwyn 2003). In other words ICT in language education has made it possible for students, teachers, specialists and researchers to collaborate with each other in diverse ways. According to Chuah (2000) the impact which has been brought by ICT, is very visible and stiffening. This new technologies instrument has changed and innovated the way we learn. ICT provides a variety of learning opportunities for students to learn language (Melor (2007). The internet and the World Wide Web was able to provide supplementary language activities which can help students with additional practice in specific areas of language learning. These include reading tests and comprehension questions, grammar, exercise, pronunciation exercise, vocabulary tests, close tests and so forth students can search the web for such web sites for their own learning. This can help them to enhance their Language learning, The Computer Assisted Language learning (CALL) software programmes which have been designed for the purpose of language teaching despite other tools such as the internet, e-mail and others also promote students-centered language learning and help students develop their communicative skills as well (Gonglewski 2003)

This CALL programmes also provides students with a variety of choice of terms in the aspect of the target language such as; grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, what they want to practice or what skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) they want to develop and topics which are interesting. Students can manage their own learning at their own speed and based on their choice. This helps learners to take more responsibility for their own learning, which leads to greater autonomy and more learner-centered.

**Challenges Facing the Use of ICT in Language Education**

There are many challenges which affect the integration or technology into language learning. This is because of the difference in age, learning style, perception, attitudes and others which the person holds. ICT needs electricity but in Nigeria, the effective use of ICT has been hampered due to chronic non-availability of power supply to function. The role needed in education is not achieved. Some softwares and other ICT activities involves huge sum of money to purchase. The present global economic crisis makes it almost impossible to buy some of these hard and softwares. Many institutions cannot finance ICT hence it hinders its penetration and provision in educational institutions and other sectors of the economy.

ICT requires trained personnel for effective management, in most cases, the technicians and man powers are not available, which makes ICT operation problematic to hands. On the path of the learners, basic knowledge of computer applications and their internet literacy are positive ways in language learning. However, many learners are not computer literate which makes it impossible for them to manipulate activities on the computer and source information from the internet.

**Conclusion**

The role of ICT to any nation cannot be over-emphasized. The acquisition to knowledge and skills through ICT enhances productivity and reduces unemployment problems. ICT continues to be a
powerful tool in the 21st century. It remains a catalyst for radical changes in existing school practices and veritable vehicle for preparing the language students.

Recommendations
Based on the various ways ICT tools can be used in language learning the author recommends as follows.
1. Teachers and learners should be exposed to exploit inbuilt simple language learning facilitators as obtained in Microsoft office suits such as Office 2007 where for instance, for pausing your cursor over a word, a translation screen Tip that translates the word you pause the cursor into another language, automatically appears.
2. The government should include ICT in the curriculum.
3. ICT centers should be established in every organization with relevant resources.
4. Seminars, Workshops and conferences on ICT should be organized for staff.
5. Lecturers should be involved in ICT training and retraining through in-service programmes.
6. The users of ICT resources should be monitored and evaluated regularly.

References


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