

INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY INTO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: HOPE AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Integration of Information and Communication Technology into the teaching and learning of English Language in the age of globalization is of utmost importance considering the importance of the use of English Language both in Nigeria and globally. There are evidences that several facilities of the ICT enable effective teaching and learning of different aspects of the language. These in turn will enable communicative competence in students both in speech and in writing. However, there could be challenges to the realization of this in Nigeria. This paper looks at these challenges and suggests ways of ensuring proper integration of ICTS into the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian Schools.

Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing changes in our ways of life as a result of explosion of knowledge in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) globally. The Internet and the web which are some of the ICT facilities have now provided wider access to information and new instructional possibilities thus, changing the process of education.

Integration of ICTs into the teaching and learning of English Language has become an urgent need in this Information and Communication Technology age, considering the importance of English as a Language of globalization. This is because English Language is an international language, spoken by nearly 2 billion people in the world. In our Nigerian situation according to Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:88), the national linguistic policy has no alternative to the use of English. The national language policy demands the continued use of English as a medium of instruction in schools. Therefore, to teach this all important language very effectively as to warrant competence and proficiency in its use both in speech and in writing, the teaching and learning of English must be enhanced through the use of instructional resources. Some ICT facilities have been found very useful for the teaching and learning of English.

The teaching of English Language is geared towards acquisition of skills in the four language skills:- Listening, Speech, Reading and Writing. These enable the use of the language for effective communication. To achieve this especially in this present time when a great number of students lack the spirit of scholarship is not easy. Teaching English Language is very complex. Infact, Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:90) opined that the teaching of languages such as English as a second language is far more complex than the teaching of theoretical subjects; that it involves not only the teaching of linguistic forms but also the teaching of communicative uses. They also pointed out from Obanya (1987) that the second language learner does not have the natural native environment to learn the language, the knowledge he gains is from the teachers in a formal setting.

With innovations in language education, opportunities abound for children to benefit from learning another language by developing competence in the second language. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that to develop this competence, ICTs must be used and for there to be any use of the ICTs in teaching and learning of English, teacher's competence sets the limits to students proficiency both in the use of ICT to learn English and in using the Language for effective communication.

It is also evident that with integration of ICTs into education, there are possibilities for stimulating accurate second language teaching and learning of the various language skills. It is against the backdrop that this paper examines these possibilities and posits that the extent to which these could be achieved will depend on overcoming of the challenges of administrative and institutional readiness, preparation of teachers and students to use the facilities, attitude to innovations, pedagogical changes in curriculum of English Language and other things.

Meaning of ICT

Information and Communication Technology refers to technologies facilitating communication and transmission of various kinds of information world over. It is a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to create, disseminate, store and manage information. Such technologies include: Computers, Internet, Broadcasting technologies- radio and Television and Telephone.

In relation to Education, the use of ICTs in teaching and learning is described as most important widely discussed issue. Akabogu (2007:173) reported that educational system all over the world are under increasing pressure to use the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to teach students the knowledge and skills required for the 21st Century. Earlier in their world report (1998), UNESCO in Akabogu (2007:173) described the radical implications of the new information and communication technology have on conventional teaching and learning, and predicted transformation of the teaching and learning process and the ways teachers and leaders gain access to knowledge and information.

ICTs and the Teaching of English Language

Like any other subject learnt in schools, English language must be taught with the use of resources enabling effective understanding of the contents and the contexts of its study. ICT facilities have been found as a veritable tool for effective teaching and learning of English. Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:91) believed that ICT can perform multivalent roles in English Language teaching especially in a second Language setting; that it can be a complement to the teacher, as well serve as a coping strategy where the teacher as a role model, is contestable. In other words, in a second Language learning situation of English such as in Nigeria, teachers need to complement their teaching with these resources as it may be practically impossible to replicate all real life, meaning and accurate situations in which learners are likely to use the Language in their everyday life and activities. It is believed that ICTs provide opportunities and possibilities for stimulating accurate second language teaching and learning contents.

Educators world over recognize the fact that multidimensional aids such as ICTs can create both dependent and collaborative learning environment in which students can learn the language. In other words, ICTs can provide broad experiences to the learners. It also means that for there to be any meaningful use of ICTs for English Language teaching and learning, a curriculum for this must be drawn up. To buttress this, Butler-Pasloe (1997) in Akabogu (2007:173) drew attention to silent characteristics and benefits of a technology-enriched curriculum for second language learners that underscore the central role technology can play in a second language teaching and learning. For instance, because computers utilize multi-sensory collection of texts, sound, pictures, video animation and hyper-media, it can be used to provide meaningful contexts to facilitate comprehension. Again, with ICTs the learner of English can be provided with experience as they move through the various stages of Language acquisition; can be used to support the writing process approach, and equally used for drills and practice designed to reinforce class instruction.

ICT facilities have been found very useful in teaching of phonology of English Language. It must be remembered that English is not native to Nigerian learners of the Language. For this reason, there is need to understand correct pronunciation of English words. Microsoft 2003 which has speech mechanism capacities can enable one hear, speak and write sentences once activated, as well as to detect right and wrong pronunciation. Also, the Power-Point facility of the computer can facilitate teaching of English pronunciation since it has inbuilt voice recorder which can be activated for dialogue. Also Akabogu (2007:173) pointed to the limitless opportunities provided by on-line databases for students to have access to authentic audiences and allow second language learners to compare the voice patterns of their speech with that of native speaker. In other words, when second language learners are placed in situations which they find interesting, providing linguistic commentaries, checking and testing students' progress and providing automatic recognition of learner's speech, they will perform well in the language to be learnt.

Aspects of Grammar – the soul of language can be learnt with ICTs. Otagbuaragu and Eze (2007:92) pointed out that the Microsoft 2003 package which has facilities for graphics and text editing can be used to correct redundancy / tautology, inappropriate use of punctuation marks, correction of grammatical errors and wrong expressions. This is because, this facility underlines in red or blue all the grammatical or mechanical errors in written texts with the help of the inbuilt dictionaries.

The Wikipedia facility of the Internet is helpful to students of English Language especially those who cannot go to English classes to study.

It is useful for finding supplementary materials for class, shows great way to help aspiring English learners, non-European learners to learn the language etc. Again, Akabogu (2007:176) enlisted some of the advantages of ICT for English to include increasing opportunities for collaborative writing, reducing intimidation factor and improving students' attitudes towards writing and encouraging creativity in Language use. Generally speaking, ICT has facilities which promote teaching in all aspects of English grammar, reading comprehension, dialogue, vocabulary etc. Internet enables English language learners to engage in live interactions irrespective of locations in the globe through e-mail, SMS thereby, encouraging writing skill.

Challenges of Integrating ICTs into the Teaching and Learning of English in Nigerian Schools

In developing nations such as Nigeria, ICTs have the potentials for increasing access to, and improving the relevance of quality of education. They are powerful tools for providing educational opportunities both in formal and non-formal learning situations. With regards to the teaching of English Language, they have been found to perform multivalent roles. However, integrating this all-pervading revolution into the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian educational system seem like an uphill task. Several challenges stare us in the face with respect to this. This situation seems to confront most educational systems in the world. Unio (2009:1) opined that the experience of introducing ICT in the classroom and other educational setting all over the world in the past decades suggests that full realization of potential benefits of ICT is not automatic. Effective integration of ICT into educational system is a complex, multifaceted process that involves not just technology. Indeed, given enough initial capital, getting technology is the easiest part, but also curriculum pedagogy, institutional readiness, teacher competence and long term financing and others. From this standpoint, this paper looks at these challenges.

Infrastructural Readiness

Before there could be any kind of integration of ICTs into teaching and learning, there must be infrastructural readiness. Techankee (2003), and de Leon Genova (2003) in Masagca and Lenderio (2008:3) stressed that in integrating e-learning to teaching and learning, that ICT can be integrated by embedding the use of web in different levels for all classes.

Considering the prerequisite above in Nigerian educational system, how ready are the educational planners and managers with infrastructural arrangements like providing enough computers to Nigerian classrooms for use by teachers and students hooking schools up to with the Internet and training of personnel? This is a million dollar question. In the universities for instance, Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:93) posited that some Universities have not acquired enough computers for instructional process, while some are yet to have Internet services to make ICT functional as instrument for English language teaching and learning. This situation is same in other tertiary institutions. No department of English in any of our institutions can boast of enough computers not to speak of having enough for instruction considering the manner in which our policies and programmes are implemented and projects funded.

Again, it is equally doubtful whether integration of ICTs into the teaching of English will be quickly realized; in the present time of economic melt-down, and government's inability to resolve crisis of strikes by teaching personnel in our educational system embarked upon partly to seek for improvement of provision of existing facilities in our institutions.

Possession of IT Skills

Another challenge for integration of ICTs into the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria even when ICTs have been put in place is possession of IT skills by teachers and students. This is very necessary if maximum benefits are to be enjoyed of the ICT potentials in teaching and learning. According to Carnoy (2004:1), despite schools having more and more access to ICT, new technologies, are still scarcely used as part of teaching methodology; He also pointed out that lack of training creates difficulties as many teachers don't have necessary IT skills as well as specific training needed for them to be able to use the new resources in the classroom. ICT use in classrooms for English Language teaching depends on teachers' skills. It is a fact that teachers cannot develop students' skills without first acquiring such skills themselves and to a much greater depth than the materials they are supposed to teach.

Most teachers of English language have not acquired the necessary skills needed to integrate ICTs into English Language teaching and learning. Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:93) noted that one of the problems facing the use of ICTs in English Language instruction in Nigerian Universities is the high rate of computer illiteracy among English Language lecturers. This situation is not different in other levels of education. For instance, Umeano (2007:59) noted that many educational systems in Nigeria have since been battling to respond effectively to the new clarion call for ICT awareness and literacy. Equally studies carried out by Yusuf (2005) and Jegede and Owolabi (2005) revealed that even though computers have come to the Post Primary Schools, the teachers have not really been affected by their presence. Teachers are key factors in any teaching and learning process. It must be noted that teachers of English Language in Nigeria are trainers of global users of the Language, if they are inadequately trained to deal with the global challenges in methodology, content and utilization of modern technologies enabling effective teaching and learning of English, standard of performance by Nigerian learners of English as second language, who they are supposed to be teaching may not measure up with those of other users all over the world who learn with ICTs.

Awareness of Use of ICT Facilities

Awareness of how to use ICTs in learning English Language is yet another challenges facing integration of ICTs into the Language teaching in Nigeria. Generally speaking, for students to understand and benefit from the use of ICTs to learn, they must be conversant with various ways ICTs can be used to learn. According to Carnoy (2004:14), for ICT to permeate teaching, students may have to have access to computer on a scale only available in limited numbers of schools and to databases that are now largely proprietary. In our Nigerian situation, Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:93) pointed out that most students are not computer literate, and that ICT-assisted English Language instruction will demand a measure of computer literacy and awareness by students. Again, from interaction with students, most are not aware that teaching and learning can be done via the Internet. With this kind of exposure, it may not be possible to get most Nigerian students to benefit from the riches of ICTs.

Consideration of Existing Curriculum

Integration of ICTs into teaching and learning of English will require consideration of existing curriculum context and methodology of English Language and making it ICT compliant i.e a curriculum that will be structured to embed the use of ICTs in the teaching / learning process. There must be an analysis of the present curriculum pedagogy. Masagca and Londerio (2008) reported that integrating ICTs in the school curriculum must be greatly considered so that effectiveness and efficiency could be ensured. Further more, Pope and Golub (2000) in Akabogu (2007:175) emphasized infusion of technology into language and teacher preparation schemes by introducing and infusing technology in context. That is to say that integration of ICTs into the curriculum of English language in Nigeria in this 21st century, will not only integrate authentic environment, but also integrate the various language skills as well as technology fully into the language learning process.

Resistance to Innovative Changes

Resistance to change is yet another major challenge of integrating ICTs to English Language education. It is a common knowledge that people are averse to change. Evidences abound that often times, people show great resistance to innovations even educational ones. Many reason attest for this fact. For instance, Cuban historical research findings cited in Carnoy (2008:14) suggested that classroom teachers resist any technology that does not facilitate their achieving the diverse goals the educational system set for them and that teachers resistance to use of ICTs may lead to failure of this technology to permeate teaching. He went further to give reasons that teachers resistance to ICT is because they don't feel comfortable using it except for the rudimentary operations; and that resources are not available to train them in teaching methods that incorporate ICT into every teaching.

This attitude to change also applies to the students. Enuesike, Otagburuagu, Okwor and Ezeonwu, (1997) in Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:91) in their studies on "Attitudes of Nigerian students towards the use of the media in English Language" found out that students are often not positively disposed towards the use of the media in Language teaching because they consider such exposure a waste of time. However, Pope and Golub (2000) in Akabogu (2007: 176) contended that in this ICT dominated era, language teachers must be ready to step into the status quo as well as advance the teaching profession by infusing technology into their teaching.

Preference to Old Methods

Many a times, integration of innovations in education also have been resisted as a result of preference to old methods and as a result, nothing really changes. Critically, looking at the average classroom situation and position of teaching and learning today, Obeng (2009:2) observed that nothing substantially changed as students have continued to use paper, pen and pencil, teachers write extensive notes on the blackboard with students furiously trying to copy all that is written, expecting to memorize all facts and spit them out during exams. A closer look at our institutions shows continuous focus on traditional methods of teaching and learning. Preference to traditional methods in heat of implementation of innovations has been reported in several studies carried out on the use of resources in teaching and learning as one of the impediments to application of such innovations.

With regards to the teaching of English, Otagburuagu and Eze (2007:89) reported that efforts made in the 1980s to introduce communicative methodology through English for specific purpose-oriented curriculum were subtly resisted by English Language teaching practitioners. Also most ICT materials in federal universities were locked up in cupboards in administrative offices, and teachers considered this methodology an outrage which they cannot condone and felt satisfied with old methods of teaching. This experience is not different elsewhere in the world. For instance, in Carnoy (2004:11) it is reported that despite characteristically greater ICT skills of university personnel, professors still teach in classrooms, present their materials in lecture forms and ask for written assignments, even though these assignments may be sent to the professors in electronic form. The highest form of academic work, PhD dissertation is still a written book supervised by an advisor in a series of personal meetings.

With these experiences and considering the lackadaisical attitude of Nigerians towards implementation of policies, there is fear that many teachers in the educational sector may still prefer teaching English Language using traditional methods even in the face of these great pervading revolutionary changes in education.

What can be Done?

In the light of these challenges facing integration of ICTs into the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian Schools, the question now is what can be done to arrest these challenges? To fast track the achievement of the achievement integrating ICTs in teaching learning of English Language, the following suggestions have been given:

1. As a nation, we should recognize English Language Education as a priority and view ICT as an important investment area both as a pedagogical tool and as a means of enhancing development of expertise. To achieve this will require huge financial resource to equip our schools with modern ICT facilities. There is also the need for private and public sector involvement in building and upgrading ICT infrastructures as this will gradually lead to virtual system education which is the desire of every nation.
2. Literacy of ICT facilities and modes of utilization are very essential to use by teachers and students for teaching and learning of English Language. There is need for digital literacy which is believed will empower them to teach and learn this language effectively in schools. Training programmes must be organized for Language teachers in our schools to keep them abreast with potentialities of ICTs for English and how to effectively integrate this in their teaching. Also, students are required to acquire necessary skills to enable them participate fully and benefit immensely from modern ways of learning English Language.
3. It is believed that for the desired change in curriculum pedagogy, use of ICT should be incorporated into the English Language curriculum. This could serve as a tool to change the

traditional content of course and enable students acquire basic knowledge of ICT and its integration into the subject. In order to enforce use of communicatively-oriented methodology, there is also need to discourage teachers from sticking to orientation of using traditional methods in teaching the Language. This could be in form of elevations to higher positions or punishment for non-compliance with the new methods.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying that ICT facilities if fully integrated into the teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian Schools will enhance communicative performance of students in this language both in speech and in writing in the face of globalization.

However, possibilities of using ICTs for English language hinge on certain predictions which include: institutional, teacher and student readiness for ICT policy implementation, changes in curriculum pedagogy, attitude of educational personnel and students towards adaptation to changes etc. It is believed that the suggestions given in this write up could lead to achievement of integration of ICTs to teaching of English language and realization of some of the millennium development goals for education in Nigeria if nipped in the bud.

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