

# TRAINING THE LANGUAGE TEACHER IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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## **Abstract**

Language is described as a vital medium through which meaningful dissemination of information takes place. Language learning experience drastic changes in the way it is carried out due to the changes in the kind of language proficiency needed. For such maximum proficiency in oracy and other skills to be achieved throughout the nation a network based language teaching is introduced. This paper examined the various changes in the demand of language proficiency that led to the introduction of Network-Based Language Teaching. In the process of examining the changes, the paper highlighted the position of Computer Based Language Teaching (CLT) in Nigeria and how it can make meaningful progress.

## **Introduction**

Network-Based Learning is a well-structured interactive approach to learning through Internet connection. In an attempt to go side by side with the challenge and complex demands of the world in oral proficiency, economized and sophisticated interactions among humans were meaningfully deployed through multimedia, web-based environment.

Agaja (2005) maintains that the emergence of Internet brought into the world a wider data base for students and researchers to acquire knowledge and engage in participatory research.

This implies that the pressing demands and changing roles of the demands has transformed the teaching of language from that of desecrate grammatical structures to the fostering of communicative ability. In this regard, creative self expression has suppressed recitation of memorized dialogues. Negotiation of meaning has taken precedence over structural drill practice. Therefore, it has become necessary to provide comprehensible input in language textbooks that would distinguish spoken and written language forms and incorporate authentic texts such as advertisement and realia along side literary text (Warschauer and Kern, 2005). These unending changes came at the time when most significant areas of innovation in language education came into existence. The emergence of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has transformed the teaching/learning process to conform with the demand in the kind of proficiency learners need in order to fit into the society. Changes in language teaching methods throughout history, according to Richards and Rodgers, (1986) have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners' need, such as a move towards oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension.

This indicates the need for meaningful interaction in authentic discourse among learners thereby increasing the demands of using computer as a vehicle for interactive human 'communication so as to achieve the target aim. As Kern and Warschauer (2000) point out that computer can play the role of mediated tools that shape the ways we interact with the world.

Nowadays, the target aim makes it possible for media centre where language learners can use multimedia CD ROMS and laser disc, access foreign language documents on the World Wide Web and communicate with their teachers, fellow mates, friends and native speakers by to replace audio tape based language tales.

Furthermore, this recent development in language teaching made teaching/learning process a computer-mediated communication. This occurs in written, electronic archived form which gives

additional opportunities for learners to plan their discourse and to notice and reflect on language use in the messages they compose or read. They can communicate with native speakers and other language learners all over the world (twenty four hours a day and from anywhere). They can also communicate on a one-to-one or many-to-many basis in local area network conferences (Warshauer and Kern 2000).

The Network based language teaching innovation which allows the use of computers connected to one another to enhance effective dissemination of knowledge has made a remarkable impact on language teaching. It has stimulated the creative talents in most teachers as well as learners. The teachers developed creative ways of rubbing minds with learner thereby tilting the innate creativity in learners. Sample of well planned classroom activities on the Internet could be found in many books (Warschauer, 1995), (Dudency 2001). Such innovation, according to Agaja (2005) will enable students to take charge of their own learning through direct exploration, expression and experience. This shifts the students' role from being taught to learning and the teacher's role from expert to collaborator or guide.

### **The Shifting Perspectives**

Warshauer and Kern (2000) have identified the shifting perspective on language learning/teaching to be principally three, complex overlapping of theoretical movements which are structural, cognitive and socio-cognitive. Each of this, according to the authors, contributed in one way or the other on the use of Internet in language teaching

The approach to language teaching has been categorised into two: rule-governed approach or behaviour formation approach. Before the 20th Century, the focus of language teaching was on formal analysis of the system of structure that makes up a given language. This era sees language as a ruled governed as well as behaviour formation. The emphasis of the former is on mastery of the rules of the language while the latter is on learning the correct structures and production of formally correct sentences. Methods like Grammar Translation Method which gives emphasis to learning the rules of the language and translation of the literature of the language was principally patronized. Also the Audio-Lingual method which sees language as a form of habit formation hence, over burden students with loss of dialogue and pattern drills was also patronized.

### **Cognitive/Constructivist Perspectives**

Chomsky (1957, 1965) rejected the views of Skinner and proposed a transformational generative grammar that mediated between deep structure and surface structures of language 9-6-7-, 196N The argument is that an individual's grammar is guided by innate cognitive structure rather than by behavioural reinforcement. Chomsky's theory has greatly helped in fostering learner's mental construction of second language system over and above instilling accurate language habit. Therefore, language learning becomes an active process of generating and transforming knowledge as opposed to a conditional response. The emphasis on second language teaching is the development of a cognitive, problem solving approach, focused on heuristic exercises and collaborative tasks organised in staged processes such as ideas generation, drafting and revising as opposed to mimicking of correct structures. Such method like cognitive code learning method is patronized here.

### **Socio-Cognitive Perspective**

Hymes (1971) remarked that there are rules of use without which rules of grammar would be useless. Therefore social acceptability of language via its contextual structure plays vital roles in language teaching/learning process. In this era, communicative competence is the major focus of

language teaching. Here, both linguistic, sociolinguistic discourse as well as strategic competence forms the basis for interactive communicative language teaching. This is aimed at enabling the learners to enter into any kind of authentic social discourse situation and discourse communities that they would encounter outside classroom environment. Hence, reading and writing were centered on drilling learners on how to communicate effectively to particular group of people through discussion, dialogue, conversation and analysis of different forms of writing and reading activities.

According to Warschaver and Kern (2000) 'shifts in perspectives on language learning and teaching have developed from mainframe to the personal then to the networked computers. In this regard, just as in the structural approach where repeated drilling on the same material in language learning is enhance, the authors maintain that the 1960s and 1970s grammar, vocabulary, tutorials drills and language testing were mainly developed for mainframe computers to provide immediate positive/negative feedback to learners on formal accuracy of their responses.

Due to the short coming of structural approaches to language teaching which stirred little excitement among learners and teachers because of allowing one acceptable response at a time, which combined with the rejection of behaviourist approach to language teaching lead to the development of cognitive approach to language teaching lead to the development of cognitive approach to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This allows learners to construct new knowledge through exploration of the micro-world. It provides opportunities for learners to use their knowledge to develop new understanding by solving problems and testing hypothesis.

This consists of more avenues for creativity where learners create their own custom video albums which they store in their own computer diskettes or walk around and explore stimulated environment in multimedia video disc programmes like Philippe, video footstep etc.

In 1990's Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was criticized of being used in an adhoc and disconnected fashion thereby presenting patterned and artificial interactive activities that are not intelligent and challenging enough to the oral proficiency development of the learner. Therefore, the need to redirect the use of computer assisted language learning towards creating connectivity in language learning in call for.

The need for oral proficiency in meaningful discourse makes socio-cognitive approach to computer assisted language learning to change from learners interaction with computer to interaction with other humans via computers. It based its own ideology on both theoretical and technological developments i.e. it tries to incorporate meaningful interactions in authentic discourse communities to computer, networking systems.

Computer networking in language classroom, according to Warschaver and Kern (2000) stems from two important technologies and social development: Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and globally linked hypertext.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) allows learners with network to communicate in either synchronous or asynchronous ways. It consists of such tools as e-mail, which allows participants to compose messages, or intern-: Ray chat or moos which allow individuals all around the world to have simultaneous conversation by typing at the key boards. It also permits one to many communicating thereby allowing a teacher or a student to share a message with a small group, the whole class, a partner class, or an international discussion list involving hundreds/thousands of people. It facilitates collaborative reading and writing.

Globally linked hypertext organizes links and access information. Its important features are (1) Informational representation through multi-linear strand linked electronically (2) integration of graphic, audio and audiovisual information together with text (3) rapid global access and (4) ease and low cost of international publication.

These new technologies, according to the authors serve new teaching/learning process as well as shape the processes to conform to the demands of the teaching/learning programme. The language learners are therefore seriously in need of this new form of communication because so much international communication is conducted. Investigations have shown that learning initiatives has made remarkable effort in offering a medium for effective, reflective and meaningful change in language teaching/learning process. It has improved the quality of the learning experience of the students by centering the learning process to the learners.

### **The Perspective of Learning in the Future**

E-learning in language teaching is still emerging as a field, and current negative features are signs of success in the field. They are challenges that can be overcome through effective design, implementation, instruction and evaluation.

The major issue is that e-learning is gradually developing and as such greater commitments need to be exerted by the authorities to see that the policies formulated are effectively implemented.

Donert (2006) in a response to this says that 'we are wasting a lot of time and effort on administrative processes to the detriment of improving the quality of learning experience of the students. Here effort should be made to make actual use of the internet in language classes rather than creating activities on paper without actual use in actual classroom situation.

According to Agaja (2005) access to the Internet in language learning is very limited in all higher institutions in Nigeria. About 90 percent of schools/colleges/universities in Nigeria are without Internet connections while less than 2 percent have Internet. In an ideal situation, the issues of e-learning are expected to run from the primary through the secondary to the tertiary institution but the reverse is the call. The current demand of communication system in language teaching makes it necessary to restructure the manner of implementing our policies to be able to produce graduate that are well equipped to face the challenges of the oral proficiency age.

Teachers as well as administrators need to be up and doing to enable the learner to make a difference and have great influence over the learning process by giving him enough access to Network based language teaching.

### **Conclusion**

Network based language learning according to Meskill and Ranglove (2000) displays language as unit activities in a collaborative, creative, experimental, environmental learning and social computing. For such element to be realized, language teaching needs to be redesigned, rethought of and redeveloped based on the current technology. It has been realized that the Net-Work Based Learning provides up-to-date, authentic materials and opportunities for real life communication in language classroom. Therefore, it is seen as an avenue where learners can discover language for themselves around the classroom environment this by extension, implies that meaningful units of activities can be learned and experimented by the learners in a collaborative and creative manner through Network connections.

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