

COMPUTER LITERACY AN INEVITABLE FACTOR IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The computer has been a veritable tool in the advancement of man in all spheres of human endeavours especially in the education sector. The computer as an instructional aid in language teaching and learning is a diverse and rapidly expanding phenomenon. The focus of this paper is to examine the impact of computer aided instruction in the area of language education and also attempt a general overview of the role of information technology in language acquisition.

Introduction

The computer is a machine used for storing, retrieving and monitoring data. Quirk and Widdowson (1984:89), refer to it "as a powerful means of manipulating symbolic codes". The computer machine acts as the "knower" who corrects all form of errors eg. Spelling, repetitions etc and at the same time, monitors the learners progress if given sufficient sophisticated software. It has succeeded in breaking the barrier between the classroom and the outside world. This is why it is considered at present to be the most effective aid in teaching.

In recent years, the computer has established itself as an important feature of modern life. Many of us use computers daily sometimes without being aware of the fact. According to Ahmad, et al (1985:1), the computer revolution is more than just a technological development; it may well change society as radically as did the industrial revolution.

Various innovations exist through the use of computer technology in lecture delivery. It facilitates visualization which consolidates the understanding of abstract processes. Computer has also been used to facilitate cooperative learning process, higher order thinking skills such as abstract thinking applying theoretical construct in practical exercise, teaching the capacity to express complex ideas logically and fluently and teaching collaborative problem solving are all possible by the use of computer technology.

Information Technology and Language Teaching

Presently, language teaching, learning and technology have become virtually inseparable. According to Adegbija (2004), technology has become the backbone and lifeblood of contemporary language teaching methodologies. He maintained that several technological strategies, facilities and devices such as audio conferencing in distance learning courses, networked collaborative interaction, computer assisted proceeding training, etc have become common place in language teaching in most parts of the world.

To lend credence to Adegbija's assertion, the internet contains a lot of resources that teachers can access and use to prepare teaching materials. These range from sites specifically designed for teachers and learners to sites from national and international newspapers, galleries and so on.

The incredible expanse of the internet means the teacher has the ability to tailor lessons very specifically to students' needs and interests. Much material is modern and up to date, which helps motivate students; as good websites continually update their materials. The internet is a dynamic medium involving movement from site to site, promoting decision-making and learner-independence.

Using the internet brings the real world into the classroom and gives the students the opportunity to explore learning in different ways. With it, learners tend to respond better when they feel involved and engaged in the subject and the extent of the web means that if you can find out what the students are interested in, you can find it on the web. The internet is a fantastic tool for teachers. It's not the answer to simple teaching or learning, but it is an incredibly motivating resource both teachers and learners. The information technology assists us, to a large extent, in dealing with problems in language teaching relating to large class, boredom and lack of interest.

Students are exposed to be able to access the wealth of information available on the internet. Through increased use of technology, the well-informed language teacher can also achieve more professional tests that are more rigorously conducted and relevant to real life situations.

Information technology has the immense potential to enhance the language teacher's ability to wade into many problems confronted in the learning/teaching environment. Also, more effective management of language teaching programmes can also be achieved through the immense capacity of computer technology.

From the foregoing, one will agree beyond reasonable doubt that information technology can enhance course delivery and facilitate independent and autonomous language learning by learners and enhance self-development and self-improvement for the teacher thereby, speeding the achievement of high level of professionalism, expertise and ensuring currency in content, methodology, strategies and materials for the efficient teacher.

Role of Computer and Information Technology in Language Acquisition

A socio-linguistic fact of second language acquisition is that acquiring a second language particularly for educational purposes, implies a form of contact with culture and history of the speakers language teaching has witnessed several approaches to and trends in it. Some these include the academic style aimed primarily at the learning of a second language as academic subject, the social communicative style with focus on the ability to use a language appropriately to the communicative approach with the focus on the learner and the awareness of a purpose or function (Bruncano and Ribeiro, 1999:14). All the above mentioned approaches had the same objectives which are to function as a tool for understanding and explaining eventualities and the reasons for them. It is this common objective that incidentally provides the basis for the use of technology in language learning. Although these methods provide an individual with very sound skills, the different applications of the computer such as for information and knowledge transfer, have made the introduction of technology an inevitable - factor of language teaching and learning. The goal of language learning is communication and since technology aims at understanding the nature of the complexities involved in a language based communication, the use of technology in language teaching and learning becomes more desirable for this very reason. The objective of language learning and teaching can only be best achieved through technologically enhanced teaching and learning.

Undoubtedly, the objective of English teaching and learning in Nigeria is to develop in learners, a proficiency in communication, which is socially adequate. It is for this reason that this paper wishes to focus on the role of computers in language acquisition, otherwise known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Kohn (1999:5) has observed that the aim of CALL is to address 'the specific needs of second language learners and tutors in computer based learning and training environments.' CALL has undergone transformation in recent years. Although, many of the changes in CALL originated from economic and social changes, the changes also affected the role of the teacher. Teachers who were formerly considered the sole source of language information were now seen as facilitators of learning. As facilitators, teachers had their own duties redefined. They were required not only to know how to instruct learners in the effective use of materials but also to become more responsive to learners needs instead of just dogmatically following the laid down concepts in the curriculum in their teaching. The resultant effect of this mode is that its success became hinged in teacher training because of the very flexible classroom the teacher is now confronted with where he requires the ability to use networked computers as well as other resources effectively. Today, language teaching, learning and technology have become virtually inseparable. In effect, contemporary technology has brought about a revolution in language teaching. It is the kind of revolution that can assist us in solving some of the language teaching and learning problems in Nigeria.

The principal problem with contemporary technology in the Nigerian context, however, is that access and familiarity with the internet are fundamental requirements for the successful use or instructional communication.

Applicability of Computers in Language Teaching in Nigeria

Despite the fact that computer have been introduced into language learning for

over 40 years in Europe, it is yet to make an impact in Nigeria. There is no doubt that a great deal of innovation in language teaching has come about through new technologies. There is also evidence to show that the present technology will alter the way we teach language. A statement which cannot be truer of our situation is that:

If the education system is to take advantage of the new digital technology, it will have to change its attitude of resistance to change and accept the new technology (i.e. computer) and as such, make it a subject itself and view it as a revolutionary tool that will change the process of teaching and learning (Broncano and Ribeiro, 1999: 15)

There is need for teachers of English in Higher institutions to regard the application of computer skills as a positive feature of self and career development. There is, therefore, the need for appropriate training in the use of these new technologies which teachers can undertake at their own expense without waiting for government sponsorship.

Problems of Computer Assisted Language Teaching/Learning in Nigeria

- ❖ Computing equipment is generally in short supply and if available, is either obsolete or under-utilized or of low memory.
- ❖ There is no forceful policy on computers, computer educational systems and their status in institutions of learning in Nigeria.
- ❖ Lack of technical personnel,
- ❖ Constant interruption of electricity.

Possible Solutions to Computer Assisted Language Teaching

The following are proffered as solution to the problem of computer assisted instruction.

1. Government should bring out policies on the development of computer assisted instruction. The integration of computer education into the Curriculum from primary to tertiary institution is necessary.
2. Computer education technology requires careful planning. Therefore educational goals and operational objectives must be harmonized to clearly define the mission of the computer in view of the related activities, in support of the overall education programme.
3. The willingness and ability of teachers to use the computer as an everyday teaching tool should be encouraged.

Conclusion

Although Nigeria is at the infant stage in the development of computer assisted instruction compared to the standard in the world, if effort is intensified and other laudable suggestions considered, accepted and adopted, Nigeria Position will improve.

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