

APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper discussed the importance of using Information and Communication Technology systems in teaching English language to learners at the primary and secondary schools levels. It highlighted the basic issues about ICT systems and how they can be applied to the proper teaching and learning of English language using direct communication approach from the native speakers of the language from computers and the internet. The paper also postulates the relevance and importance of ICT systems to our primary and secondary schools learners as a way of providing the individual learners with independent opportunities to study English language at their own pace. More over, the paper also exposes the various challenges that militate against the effective use of ICT system in Nigerian school system and finally provides the way forward for the improvement on the use of ICT systems for the teaching and learning process in Nigerian schools.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology refers to the scientific technology which are used for the receiving and sending of messages electronically for the propose of communication. The ICT systems now cover the whole world as the most modern method of communication in a faster and more efficient manner in recent times. It makes use of computers, internet and multi-media systems in digital form. The most important communication system that rules the world in all facets is the internet. It now becomes the key that unlocks every information in all fields around the world through the computers.

The internet according to Emenanjo (2005, 2-17) has brought about an intimidating revolution and explosion in the storage, speed, exchange and dissemination of information on practically all subjects under the sun. The internet through the World Wide Web (www) maintains and distributes multimedia documents which incorporates textbooks, pictures, audio, graphics, video and advertisement from all over the world. The greatest importance and the basic asset of the internet is in its capacity to allow the users to interact directly with each other. Through its usenet, the users can exchange any information of their interest on every field of discourse.

It is significant to note that the internet provides what is known as virtual library. This virtual library is meant for learning and acquisition of knowledge, provision of research materials, introduction of a more solid base for educational materials, research facts and information through ICT system. As we can see, the internet is an indispensable modern source of research materials for teaching and learning, because it serves as the store house of knowledge in all disciplines and studies.

The Importance of ICT Application to Learning Processes

Information and Communication Technology is a vital tool for the enhancement of any leaning process since it controls the major sources of research materials and information required by every learner through out the world. It helps the learners to apply ICT to their basic education skills by making them to increase their knowledge, self esteem and confidence in their various professions.

The same ICT has greatly helped in propagation and enthronelement of English language as the most widely spoken and written language all over the world by its application of the language in the system. It over simplifies the written language as a medium of communication.

Another major aspect of ICT is in the enrichment of the language of internet and computers through the addition of new technical words to the lexicon of English language. Such vocabulary include, e-mail, text messaging, online chats, listeners, websites, audio and video conferencing and electronic discourse. Other forms of new incorporation into English study and usage are extensive abbreviations of words whether old or new, the extention of semantics of the old words and brand new words with their distinct meanings. More examples of such words are, browse, attachment, chat, compose, file, flash, task, menu, mouse, password, save, surf, virus, cybercafe, cyberland, download, emoticon, keypad, netiquette, netspeak, pincode, spam, texter, teximate etc. All these words have new meanings that differ from the original meanings because of the new applications and usage in ICT system. In this situation it is then proper to use ICT to teach English language so that all these words and many more could be properly explained to the learners according to Taiwo (2004).

Khon (1998,5-120) in his observation about the teaching of English language emphasizes that there can not be good language learning without the help of information Communication Technology system. ICT systems then facilitates learners autonomy, communication embedded target language learning, tutoring and open pedagogic integration to language teaching and learning according to Khon. Given the importance of English language in Nigeria as the first official language, Ekah (2004, 57-69) postulates that the only available choice towards English is to teach and learn the language within the acceptable international standard. This of course implies the application of ICT for the teaching and learning of the language in schools as it is done in advanced foreign countries throughout the world.

Application of ICT to the Teaching of English Language

The teaching and learning of audio aural skills in English language can better be done by digital laboratories, for both small and large classes within and outside the classroom according to Emenanjo (2005, 12). He postulates that computers interconnected by telecommunications are very effective when education becomes independent of the location of the learners. With these ICT, internet, computers and multimedia systems learning can now take place in the offices, homes and centres rather than classrooms. For example many universities in the United States of America, according to Emenanjo (2002) have interactive telecommunication facilities that provide instructions from central locations to distance telecampuses which could be office buildings or private learning centres and homes of the learners.

From practical demonstration experience on the teaching of the phonology of English language, involving the primary, secondary and double articulation, phonation types, nasalization, aspiration, breathy voice, rhyme and stresses, syllabation, tone and intonation, minimum pairs, syllable timing, stress timing, vowel features, (assimilation, deletion length) downstep, downdrift, updrift and other aspects are better processed, appreciated experienced, taught, learnt and illustrated by ICT based system in language laboratories than in the classroom, Emenanjo (2005). The old language laboratories at some universities are now replaced by the compact, mobile collapsible ones. The basic issue here is that the phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax of English language can be better taught and learned practically and interestingly by the use of ICT systems.

In application of ICT to the teaching and learning of English and other languages, Shobomein (2005, 55) postulates diagnostic example of the use of ICT in language research. It comes about

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through the evolution of different perspectives on language learning and teaching process. Moreover, in a country like Nigeria, the only official language of communication, administration, business and education is the English language. This encourages the people in the country and the educational system to study, learn and use the language as a second language although given the position of first language because of its official usage.

In order to satisfy the modern teaching and learning processes, Okwudish et al, (2005, 20) also states that the goal of learning the second language is to help the learner to develop the ability to communicate with speakers of the second language. To achieve this goal the learner needs to use the language in a variety of real life, meaningful and culturally accurate situations designed to promote relevant communication. However, in the second language teaching and learning situation, Information and Communication Technology systems provide opportunities and possibilities for simulating accurate second language teaching and learning. Also, the educational systems all over the world are under increasing pressure to use the new information and communication technologies to teach the learners the knowledge they need in the 21st century according to UNESCO. Again UNESCO describes the radical implications the new information and communication technologies have for conventional teaching and learning and predicts a transformation of the teaching and learning process from the ways teachers and students gain access to knowledge and information through ICTS, as stated by Emananjo (2005).

The information and communication technology as a resource for teaching and learning of second language is increasing, as educators recognize its ability to create both independent and collaborative learning environments, in which students can learn the new language is postulated by Butler-Pascoe (1997). She draws attention to the salient characteristics and benefits of a technology enriched curriculum of second language learners, that underscores the central role technology can play in second language teaching and learning. Since computers utilize a multi-sensory collection of text, sound, pictures, video, animation and hypermedia, it can be used to provide meaningful context to facilitate comprehension and effective communication. Butler-Pascoe further explains that ICT provides students with language experiences as they move through the various stages of language acquisition as it also supports the writing process approach. It can also be used for drills and practice designed to reinforce class instructions.

As a matter of fact, ICT provides limitless opportunities provided by on-line databases for students to have access to authentic facts that allow second language learners to compare the voice patterns of their speech to that of the native speakers of the language. This is compared to computer-based immersion method, which is build on the theory that language is best mastered when the learners are surrounded by only the native speakers, Butler-Pascoe (2005). The immersion method simulates a second language environment by elements such as placing the students in situation which they find interesting, providing linguistic commentaries, checking and testing students progress.

Since the developed world in recent years has great interest towards the use of ICT to teach their learners, teachers in developing countries should learn to adopt the use of ICT in their teaching and learning process. Warschauer and Healey (1998, 57-71) identify three main stages in computer assisted language learning. These are Behaviouristic call, communicative call and integrative call. Behaviouristic call according to Warschauer, is characterized by repetitive language drills referred to as drill and practice. In this model, the computer is viewed as a mechanical tutor which never grew tired and allows the students to work at an individual pace. Much later, the communicative call emerged in the late 1960s and early 1980s.

This communicative call proposed that computer based activities in language teaching and learning should focus more on using forms or application of the language components, words, vocabulary and lexical items rather than studying the forms as traditional grammar method of teaching. This implicit approach encourages the students to generate their sentences originally rather than inherit the structural ones given in texts as examples. The proponents of the integrated model to language teaching is characterized by task-based approaches, all of which sought to integrate learners in authentic environments and also to integrate the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing using ICT systems in the learning process. Warschauer predicted that artificial intelligence will provide a central role for computers as a necessary tool for authentic language exploration and use in second language teaching in the classroom. This is how ICT systems dominate language teaching now.

Braid (1998) is in support of the use of ICT for the teaching of English language because he observes that the basic concept which should guide the use of ICT is the individual's right to information access. This right is further confirmed by the UNESCO concept of freedom of expression and access to information and new information technologies while Kalgren (1998, 8) is of the opinion that information technology must first of all build systems that support local language need as in the case of Nigeria where the most vital need in language teaching is on how to get computers that can help the teaching of local language in school.

However, in a counter opinion by Warschauer (2002), he warns that in order to obtain a holistic view of the issues at stake on the use of ICT for the teaching of English language, focus should move from the role of information technology in language teaching, to the role of language teaching using information technology system in the society. The changing context of language teaching to ICT system teaching is as a result of increasing demand for the learning of English language all over the world because it offers learners opportunity to communicate globally through the internet. It is important that in this ICT dominated era, language arts teachers must be ready to step into the status quo as well as to advance the teaching profession by infusing ICT technology into their teaching.

Challenges on the use of ICT in Teaching English

Even though, English language is the official language of communication and administration in Nigeria, it has some problems militating against it when it comes into the teaching and learning process at school. It is a fact that English has become the first language of unity to all the ethnic groups in the country because of the position given to it through our education system, social interactions, professions and business transactions. The modern Information and Communication Technology system like computers, internet and multi-media system make use of English language extensively.

Udofot (20-2,135) states that since English is the language of computer programming and the internet, Nigerians can not afford to be illiterate in the language of ICT that controls world affairs. In order to justify the importance and application of ICT to the teaching of English, the teachers of the subject in schools must be literate in computer usage. This will expose them to the international level of the language as well as the most modern and effective methods necessary for the teaching of the language. Roach (2002 3-10) supports this view by proposing that English language should not be adulterated with idiosyncratic, regional and dialectal variants as such international and original standards can only be obtained through the use of ICT only in teaching and learning process.

Application of Information and Communication Technology to the Teaching of English Language

In Nigeria where there are shortages or inadequate materials for teaching and learning, the absence of ICT systems in most of our public and private institutions is a hindrance towards the propagation, application and acquisition of effective knowledge in our educational system. Shobomehin (2005,56-63) observes that the development of language determines the effectiveness of communication which in turn determines the development of human and material resources of the society. This implies that the way the language is taught in schools will definitely affect the understanding and usage of English language by the learners and the societal development. Therefore, the application of ICT systems in teaching of the English language will enhance the study of English by the learners.

In order to further explicate the important of ICT to the teaching of English language, Akpan (2004, 38-42) is of the opinion that information resources becomes easily available and accessible through computers or computerized gadgets, since E-mail which facilitates transmission and reception of information becomes assessible, quicker and easier than before. All these enable teaching and learning of the English language better than it was, but without the ICT system learning becomes monotonous and cumbersome. Another major challenge that impedes the application of ICT system to the teaching of English is inadequate skilled ICT language teachers.

Ogunbanjo (2005,47.53) supports the fact that ICT skilled language teachers are grossly inadequate in our education system therefore where there are ICT systems in schools there are no teachers to make use of them. He blames the non application of the ICT systems in schools on the lack of effort by the educational planners and government for not developing ICT courses in schools as it is done in many foreign developed countries in the world.

Another major hindrance to the application of ICT to the teaching and learning of English is inadequate infrastructure or lack of infrastructural facilities. ICT systems cannot be operated or used in teaching without constant power supply, equipment, classroom and generating set. In all the educational institutions in this country, there is no constant electricity supply. Where there is no power the use of ICT systems for teaching is non existent or frustrating. This does not encourage even the professionals in ICT programming to make use of it or even operate it. Therefore, the stake holders in education should provide constant power supply to ICT systems if the students must benefit from it.

It is also a common knowledge that many primary and secondary schools both private and public do not have any kind of ICT systems such as computers, multi-media system, telephones and many others, therefore they have no knowledge and access to the modern technology that could enhance their learning processes. The situation is so precarious that one can only imagine what happens to the teachers and learners who do not see or know any ICT not to talk about application of ICT to their teaching which is not even available. In this process the challenge of non application of ICT system does not arise, so the government and school proprietors should be enlightened about the need for the provisions of these important modern systems to aid proper teaching and learning of English language.

The disadvantage of non provision of ICT systems to schools will leave the young learners in our schools far behind their foreign counterparts in developed countries and will also deny them the opportunity to study English language effectively and widely too. Many language exercise, drills and pictorials which are only available in internet cannot be accessed without the availability of the systems in the school. Teaching and learning of the language has really assumed scientific dimension. So in order to expose the learners to the proper acquisition of the language with proper pronunciation form the native speakers ICT systems are necessary for the teaching and learning of the language.

Chauhan (1983,48-52) believes that for effective teaching of English language the teachers of the language should be psychologically prepared so as to deal with the complex application of ICT systems to their teaching. The application of ICT systems to the teaching of English language requires psychologically prepared teachers so that they can predict the attitude of the learners and guide them properly. Azikiwe (1998,31) posits that learning changes human disposition and capability over a period of time. The teachers success is evaluated in observable behaviour of the learners, so the application and challenges in the use of ICT system requires teachers knowledge of the background of the learners, individual differences, transfer of learning, organization, motivation, methods, and evaluation before the lesson becomes effective. This implies that ICT system can not be applied effectively, if the teachers of the English language do not understand basic issues about the learners level of intelligence, and previous knowledge of their educational background, which should serve as guide for the planning and implementation of their lessons using ICT systems.

Recommendations

Since ICT technology is necessary for proper study and learning of English language, the following suggestions are recommended.

- (i) The educational administration of all the states in Nigeria should introduce computer education and practical application with ICT systems in to educational curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the country.
- (ii) All the teachers should be computer literate so as to enhance their usage of ICT systems for the teaching of English and other subjects.
- (iii) Acquisition of generating sets by all the schools for the operation of ICT systems should be made compulsory to all schools in order to encourage the teachers to operate the ICT systems for effective teaching.
- (iv) In order to teach English language properly and effectively, all schools at all levels of education should have language laboratories so that oral performance and received pronunciation from the native speakers of the language should be studied directly from the original owners of the language.

Conclusion

In order to fit into the new world order in teaching, Nigeria schools system should adopt specific policy towards the promotion of the use of Information and Communication Technology system in teaching generally. The simple advantage is that it will definitely, bring more information, new approaches and concepts to the teaching and learning of English. Educational Planners should inculcate the modern ICT system into the teaching curriculum so that both the teachers and students can benefit from its application in teaching the target language. The factors that militate against the application of ICT system in school are many. They range from poor funding of schools, to lack of proper education policy to support ICT usage, lack of adequate professional man-power to operate the available ICT systems in some schools and poor electricity power supply. The moment all these things are put in place there will be no problems in application of ICT to the teaching of English language.

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