

Re-Defining the Teaching of English Language for Open Access to Information: The ICT Impact

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to identify the importance of English Language as world lingua franca and as a critical variable in commerce, communication, aviation and even in science. It also examines the need to improve its teaching and learning through the instrumentality of ICT.

Design / Methodology / Approach: The exploratory approach was adopted for the study. First a conceptual framework was developed to identify the connection between English Language and education and the imperative of English Language. The next step was to identify the tool/resources to improve the teaching of English Language.

Findings: The paper discovered that the use of ICT tools in the teaching of English Language is the remedy to the falling standard of English Language. Improvement in the teaching and learning of English also requires entrenchment of ICT in the school curricular, from the primary school stage, motivated teaching and provision of elaborate ICT materials backed up by high computer literacy level.

Practical Implication: English Language is endangered and basic oral skills will be appalling due to lack of usage and reflective practice. English lessons that incorporate multimedia applications can exert powerful motivation and provide bored students with exciting new ways to learn.

Originality / Value: The importance of this paper lies in its identification of the importance of English Language as world lingua franca, its falling standards and the tools that can assist students in acquiring English Language competency as well as enhance the quality of their learning experience.

Keywords: Redefining, English Language, open access, information, ICT.

Paper Type: Conceptual

Introduction

Human resources are the most valuable resources and vital elements in the development of any country. They are the resources that can be developed, and education must be utilized as the most important process in building people's knowledge, fundamental experiences, capabilities, high morals and ethics, preparedness to fight for self and community, and the ability to pursue a profession or trade. It can be, therefore, said that education stimulates the growth in wisdom, spiritual development, physical ability, and social awareness.

Education helps define the life, values, political culture, and economic power of a nation. Knowledge, skills, norms, and values of responsible citizenship are inculcated through education. Without education, we have no society, no democracy, and no future. Nations like Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, China, and

India readily admit that an improved education system was critical to their development process. They made education a priority focus, because they realized that without education there could be no economic leap.

But no one can talk of education without language (Otagburuagu and Eze 2006:88). The base of scientific and modern technological education is the English Language. According to Stubbs (1986:68) as cited by Otagburuagu and Eze (2006:88) 50 percent of the world's scientific literature is in English. The English Language has come to play the role of a midwife in Nigeria's socio-political and educational processes. To talk of education in Nigeria is in part, to discuss the utilitarian value of English as the nation's official language, Otagburuagu (1997). Scholars as Adekunle (1995:72) on his part agrees with this observation that the English Language is used at the pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. According to

him: English is the language of lectures and tutorials. A high degree of proficiency in English is essential for success at the tertiary level of the Nigeria educational system.

Modern English, sometimes described as the first global lingua franca, is the dominant language or in some instances even the required international language of communications, science, information technology, business, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy. A working knowledge of English has become a requirement in a number of fields, occupations and professions such as medicine, and computing; as a consequence over a billion people speak English to at least a basic level (see English Language learning and teaching). It is one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

Yet there is a growing concern about the level of English proficiency at the schools, and work places which, if left unchecked, could lead to the country losing its competitiveness especially in the industry and technical fields. Nigeria needs communicative competence to maintain its competitive edge in all aspects of our economic environment be it administration, education, trade, or finance. The result of the 2009 school certificate examination conducted by WAEC and NECO on English Language revealed that the majority of the candidates have yet to master the writing skills in English (WAEC and NECO 2009). Even the spoken English by our university undergraduates are punctuated with errors and pidgin English and a far cry from what is required. What is amis? Can the right ICT tools enhance English language teaching and learning and quickly arrest the rapid decline?

There is no doubt that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has found its niche in education. Developments in the education sector in developed and developing countries attest to the fact that ICT has become a central focus of many countries' educational policies and such, its use and integration has become widespread in the various school systems. (Ozioko, 2010).

Continuing (Ozioko 2010) further put s a finger on this in his observation that the increasing trend of the use of ICT in classroom work across the globe has been necessitated by three major factors:

- Electronic technological devices are being used to prepare the present generation of young people for a future workplace that will undoubtedly be characterized by information technology (IT). Preparing students and the wider citizenry for tomorrow's world can only be done through a careful use of ICT tools, computers, internet, spreadsheets and databases.
- ICT tools make schools more efficient in the teaching-learning enterprise Classroom teacher's personal professional development and academic productivity have been greatly enhanced.
- ICT tools are being used to improve, reform or renovate teaching and learning. Learners are stimulated to learn actively either on an independent basis or working closely with others. (Olorundare, 2007).

ICT tools have now removed the time and space limitations found in traditional teaching. Classroom dialogue can now extend beyond the time and space constraints of class time (Frayer 1997). Carmen et al; (2003) say that integrating ICT tools in teaching can lead to increased students' learning, competencies and increased opportunities for communication. Key findings under Impa CT2 (www.becta.org.uk) show that the use of ICT tools in teaching and learning has positive effect on behaviour, motivation, communication and process skills and that it enables pupils to learn more autonomously. Impa CT2 further shows that teachers in schools where pupil used ICT in English achieved higher mean gain scores. The integration of ICT tools in the teaching and learning of English have been found to bring other benefits too. Besides motivating pupils and raising self-esteem and confidence, ICT can enhance pupil interaction, verbalization and involvement in collaborative learning. (SIIA Report-2000).

Indispensable Role of English Language in Teaching and Learning, Business Science, Communication Etc

As earlier mentioned, Modern English, sometimes described as the first global lingua franca is the dominant language or in some instances even the required international language of communications, science, information technology, business, aviation,

entertainment, radio and diplomacy. It is an invaluable legacy of colonialism which has increasingly assumed a great importance all over the world. Many countries especially the former British colonies, realizing the importance of English as a language of international communication, voluntarily adopted it for official and sometimes inter-ethnic communication purposes. Consequently, there have emerged different varieties of English as a result of the nativization of the non-native varieties of English (Akabogu, 2006:171).

There is no gain saying in the fact that English Language is the most widely used language in the contemporary world today. This has resulted in an increasing demand for the learning of English language all over the world because of the opportunity it offers speakers to communicate globally and to access international media. For example, more and more people use e-mail for both personal and official communication. This according to Warschauer (2000) as cited by Akabogu (2006:175) necessitates a rethinking of the relationship of ICT (Computers and Internet) to English Language teaching. Nowadays changes are taking place faster in the contemporary world than at any other time. The rapid changes brought about by globalization and technological development call for understanding of the current socio-economic factors and their influence on English Language teaching and learning. For instance, we now have global media and businesses which extends their reach into new domains throughout the world. These same businesses and media according to Warschauer (2000:31) are re-localized in order to best meet the economic and social imperatives of functioning in different regions of the world.

Just as business and media have experienced globalization and re-localization, so has the English language. The last few decades have seen a growth in the role of English around the world as the lingua franca for economic and scientific exchanges. According to Crystal (1997) as cited by Warschauer (2000), 85% of international organization in the world make official use of English, as least 85% of the world's film market is in English, and some 90% of published academic articles in some academic fields , such as linguistics, are written in English.

Rationale for Re-Defining the Teaching of English Language

According to Oxford Advance learners Dictionary, to redefine is to do in a different way or to make people consider in a new way. Redefine as it applies to education connotes efforts made by the stake holders, especially the government towards making the educational process more effective, functional and productive. It involves injection of new ideas, methods, and techniques or strategies into educational system so as to improve both internal and external efficiency and arrangements of the system and more of development socio-cultural, political, economic or technological. In this ICT era it comes up as introduction of a new dispensation to meet the challenges posed by new technological development and to improve the quality of the system.

Education experts such as Farrant (1971), and Fafunwa (1996) contend that teaching is not just mere telling; it involves telling what, telling how, telling where, and telling when. The teaching of English Language is far more complex process than the teaching of theoretical subjects. It involves not only the teaching of linguistic forms but also the teaching of their communicative uses. The extent of telling in English language teaching and learning is, therefore, quite complex. Scholars such as Bright and McGregor (1970), Francis (1978:151), Oyetunji (19714) as cited by Otagburuagu and Eze (2006:90) argue that the students of English language are not taught with appropriate materials and that errors occur as a result of the fact that the teaching of English in schools is made too abstract and too mechanical, to profit the students. What is to be done? Will the ICT do the magic?

Vital Role of ICT in the Teaching of English Language

The world has been described as a global village due mainly to the introduction of the latest inventions in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). The relevance of ICT has been felt in every sphere of human endeavours, be it business, government, and most importantly education. The rapid advances being made in ICT, particularly in the internet, have very important implications for education, educators and learners. As of today it is difficult to imagine what ICT will be like by the end of this century. But one thing is clear, all these

advances are changing our ideas about traditional education new teaching approaches and skills, such as information literacy, new methods of teaching, new tools and techniques for teaching and learning, including English language. Advances in ICT offers an enormous increase in the amount of information available to teachers and students in their teaching and learning of English Language. Several studies illustrate the degree to which ICT tools is actually beginning to play a role in shaping activity, alleviating existing constraints and catalyzing changes in the teaching and learning of English. It was notable that English teachers most frequently pointed to ICT use improving presentation and spelling and facilitating redrafting of written work. Therefore, there is noticeable role of ICT in integrating and creating a pool of educational media. Some of the roles of ICT in teaching and learning of English language among other includes:

- a) ICT combines and integrates a variety of educational media-sound, vision, textual and numeric data for effective teaching and learning. With appropriate investment in ICT, teaching and learning of English language, which before now have been hampered by gross inadequacy of educational technology on-site, will be made more efficient and effective.
- b) ICTs' have the capacity to expand the basic nature of teaching and learning of English language. They have the ability to link written materials with audio and visual materials than can enrich the full range of the learners' senses. The technology also creates a qualitative expansion in the means of education by taking a process rooted in the one way delivery of knowledge and making it more participatory and reciprocal (Joshi and Murthy, 2004). ICT opens a wide range of nonlinear, exploratory processes that allow the learner to make full use of his or her own multiple cognitive maps.
- c) ICT, when successfully integrated into teaching and learning, can ensure the meaningful interaction of learners with information. ICT can advance cognitive skills such as comprehension, reasoning, problem-solving and creative thinking. Success in the infusion of ICT into

teaching and learning will ensure that all learners will be equipped for full participation in the knowledge society (Edafiogho 2007).

- d) The use if ICT in teaching and learning of English language has demonstrated improved inventive thinking skills, such as creativity, problem solving, higher-order thinking skills and sound reasoning, along with improved effective communication. Improvements in interpersonal skills, such as writing, public speaking, teamwork and collaboration, and improved productivity skills.
- e) ICT is a powerful instrument for teaching and learning of English Language because it allows global flow of information products within the school and outside the school. So it offers people or students great potential for radical improvement in human development.
- f) In the home, at work and in educational establishment, ICT makes the learning of English language to become a truly life long activity that is, activity in which the pace technology changes focus learning process itself
- g) Using ICT tools helps to decontextualise learning, to make explicit that which is implicit and to accentuate that which is often unnoticed. They uniquely offer new ways to express and make visible key relationships and structures within the subject matter (Noss and Hoyles 1996)
- h) Use of ICT in the teaching and learning enhances variety and appeal of classroom activity-changing the working ambience; reducing the laboriousness and tedium of work; increasing motivation, engagement and hence participation of student's in classroom work, through providing novelty and variety and creating interest and excitement and adding more fun using a different teaching and learning style.
- i) Use of ICT supports processes of checking, trailing and refinement-providing immediate feed back and encouraging self correction (e.g spell checking); supporting problem-solving

strategies through repeated trial and improvement of conjectured solutions; promoting experimentation and playing around with texts; facilitating editing and continuous redrafting; offering opportunities for investigation and exploration when introducing or reinforcing ideas; increasing pupil willingness to 'have a stab at something' and to revise their work or ideas (Hennessy et al 2010).

- j) According to (Hennessy et al 2010) the use of ICT fosters pupils independence and peer support. According to them, it offers pupils more responsibility for doing the learning, autonomy, ownership and opportunities to share their expertise with peers or provide mutual support, particularly where teacher confidence with ICT was limited and pupils were more self-sufficient.

Inherent problems and Challenges on the use of ICT for Teaching and Learning of English Language

Students access to ICT at school and at home has increased astronomically over the last few years particularly in Nigeria. A host of government / private sectors initiatives has helped to dramatically increase the prominence of ICT in Nigeria. Recent examples of ambitious infrastructures created to provide access to on-line learning resources included UNN Google initiative and UNN/MTN partnership. These initiatives have included extensive training schemes for all new and existing teachers in using ICT in subject teaching and learning.

According to policy makers world wide, such initiatives should lead to significant technological and pedagogic change within subject teaching. But surprisingly, appropriate and effective classroom use of ICT is found to be rare (e.g Ofsted 2001). In practice lip service is paid to the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Established curricular and teaching methods remain in place and available technology is often under used and poorly integrated into classroom practice.

In summary, there are many challenges facing the use of ICT in teaching and learning of English language. The challenges hinder efficient use of ICT in teaching and learning:

- One of such challenges is the epileptic or erratic power supply we have in

Nigeria. Irregular supply of electricity and the high cost of running standby power generating sets are working against efficient use of ICT in teaching and learning of English language.

- The government programmes aimed towards provision of opportunities and expertise for ICT in all school in not matched with appropriate actions as significant weaknesses are reported in policy and practice. The subject curricula, assessment frameworks and policies concerning ICT use seem to simultaneously encourage and constrain teachers in using ICT in the classroom.
- Inadequate funding: The overall education system in Nigeria is poorly funded, with the result that funds are used to solve more pressing and urgent problems that has to do with the survival needs of the school in preference to ICT for teaching English Language
- Low ICT Literacy level: Low ICT Literacy Level is one of the challenges of using ICT in teaching of English language. Most of the teachers of English language are not skilled in the use of ICT tools and therefore find it difficult impacting knowledge based on ICT. To add to this is lack of skilled manpower to manage the available systems, and inadequate training facilities for ICT education at higher education level.
- According to (Hennessy et al 2010) a further hindrance to the use of ICT in schools is that increasing investment in technology infrastructures has not been matched by investment of time and resources to develop new ways of learning and teaching. Despite numerous reported examples of effective use and apparent teacher motivation to develop their pedagogy and practice, clarification of what pupils should learn using ICT- and how teachers could facilitate this –is said to be needed. Change is likely to be limited without guidance of this kind, and without taking account of teachers' own theories about teaching and learning which are critical to integration (Mumtaz, 2000).

- Rogers (2002) and colleagues observed that teachers reluctance to abandon their existing pedagogy was more of an obstacle to teacher development in classroom of ICT than limited resources. In view of these, we agree with the scholar that ICT based English language teaching and learning will improve tremendously it teachers and students key into ICT based teaching and learning.

General recommendation

For ICT to have meaningful impact in the teaching of English language attention should be given to the following:

- a) Teachers should be given opportunities to training and retraining in ICT skills (at no cost to the teachers). Training in ICT skills is crucial in implement ICT integration in the teaching and learning of English language. As more teachers become competent in the use of basic ICT tools, there would be more ICT integrated activities in the classroom. The ICT skills of teachers need to be addressed first. In house training on ICT skills should be intensified in all schools.
- b) Indifferent attitude of some teachers towards ICT integration in teaching and learning of English language should be seriously looked into. Some teachers do go for the ICT integration courses and complete it successfully and it appears to end there. Once back in school, the teacher tend to adhere to their traditional ways of teaching. A sense of commitment and dedication on the part of the teacher is necessary.
- c) Curriculum planners should involve teachers in planning their curriculum for proper teaching and learning of English language.
- d) The government should work with the private sector to ensure provision of necessary infrastructural support, affordable and sustainable access to ICT infrastructure.
- e) Teacher must be encouraged to change their traditional orientation of theory based language teaching to a more pragmatic, communicatively-oriented

methodology. The school administrators, the ministry of educations and school inspectorate divisions should therefore urge the teachers to integrate ICT tools in the teaching and learning of English as the benefits are many.

- f) The government at various levels should ensure that the ICT policy is on course and is being properly implemented and regularly monitored
- g) ICT awareness programmes on need for computer literacy, acquisition of computer/ laptops, effective application of ICT in teaching and learning of English should be mounted by the school administrators and the government at various levels.
- h) The government should provide regular and reliable power supply for effective use of ICT applications for teaching and learning of English language.
- i) Teachers education at various levels should be revised to incorporate ICT education to ensure availability of good number of ICT functionally effective skilled teachers for a reliable, dependable and sustainable ICT education in the country.

Conclusion

Information communication technology (ICT) has a significant role to play, in enhancing the teaching and learning of English language. It provides the platform for information system in any organization whether private or public, profit or non-profit making. It is, therefore, a source of concern that enough is not being done by the government and stakeholders in education to enable it play this role. The teaching of English language therefore needed to be re-defined and refocused in line with the present realities. Appropriate ICT tools need to be provided to schools for use in teaching English language. Only then, can they become the needed tool to enhance and facilitate the teaching and learning of English language. All the opportunities offered by ICT are important to teaching and learning of English language as the process draws information from various sources and information system. In this era of rapid changes and globalization, the benefits of ICT in teaching and learning of English language may be lost if bold and concerted efforts is not made to address the problems hindering the efficient

use of ICT for teaching and learning of English language. The full cooperation and support from the Government, the school administration, positive attitude of English option teachers, continuous training to update teachers' ICT skills and appropriate training on when, when not and how to use ICT tools appropriately in classroom situations is necessary to fully realize the benefits of ICT integration.

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