
English As A Second Language Teacher In An Ict Era: Issues, Challenges And Way Forward

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of the English as a second language teacher in an era of information and communication technology, the challenges this new trend in language teaching poses to the teacher and the way forward. The paper also explores the conceptual matrix of the term ICT as well as problems associated with its teaching and learning and the way forward for the English language teacher in Nigeria. This is made in form of recommendations that can help ameliorate the associated ICT problems in language teaching.

Introduction

It is well recognized that a trained, skilled and well educated work force is critical in enhancing work and economic performance and sustaining competitiveness as Nigeria transforms into an ICT- driven and knowledge based society. By using technology as a tool, ICT has emerged as an enabler in creating, manipulating and distributing information and communication to improve the quality and effectiveness of both the public and the private sector, programs and services.

Otagburuagu and Eze (2006) noted that in Nigeria both national policies and the attitudinal disposition of the citizenry correlate positively on the use of education for social and technological changes. The National policy on education (2004) states inter alia, that education is the surest route to technological, industrial, social, economic and political development. The policy in its stated objectives notes that the national aspiration, of building a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self reliant nation.

However, no one can talk of education without language. The base of scientific and modern technological education is the English language. The English language had without doubt been involved in the late 20th and 21st century leap, in the domains of language usage. It is, according to Orabueze (2005:1), “a common heritage of the English people, but today it is spoken by different ethnic groups; and in some countries it serves as an official language”. In Nigerian situation, the English language is a second language, language of administration, and learning. It has indeed assumed an enviable status in the educational system in Nigeria, being one of the core subjects of study at both primary and secondary school levels.

In spite of its importance in teaching and learning there are difficulties in, usage, with regards to mother tongue interference, direct translation and the inability to communicate in the language through the medium of writing Akabogu, (2008).

However, the 21st century is witnessing great changes geared towards capacity building in all spheres of human endeavour for the empowerment of the citizenry Otagburuagu and Eze (2006). The English language as an international language spoken by nearly two

billion people across the globe continues to be a medium which is at the centre stage of these changes. The century has also seen the emergence of new domains for English usage. In the over 1, 500 years of its use, English has changed substantially to reflect patterns of contact with other languages and the changing communication needs of the speakers.

Educational systems all over the world are under increasing pressure to use the new information and communication technologies (ICTS) to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century UNESCO (2002). The UNESCO World Education Report (1988) describes the radical implications the new information and communication have for conventional teaching and learning and predicts a transformation of the teaching and learning processes and the way teachers and learners gain access to knowledge and information.

What is ICT?

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides opportunities and possibilities for stimulating accurate second language teaching and learning contents. Akabogu (2008) states that ICT is an acronym for Information and Communication Technology which refers to the technologies used for collecting storing, editing and passing information in various forms. In the most general sense ICT would include radio, television, telephones, videos, tape recorders, compact discs, floppy discs and personal computers. The computer with its multi-various devices is at the centre of information technology. It is a device that can be used to send and receive information. It is a kind of culture that has its own icons and it is analogous to language as a system of communication. Increasingly the term is used to refer to the internet and the “information super highway”.

Anao (2002) observes that these are part of the globalization events, which are transforming our today world into a “global village”. The impact of ICT is becoming more and more pronounced world wide such that rarely is anything mentioned in any area of human Endeavour’s without reference to this technology. Without doubt, the development of ICT is truly phenomenal and unique in history.

The Place of English Language in Nigeria Education

In Nigeria, Education is considered a paramount enterprise. Highly effective schools and improved student/pupil outcome are the key objectives of the government. Indeed, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) recognizes Education as a crucial factor to the development of the nation. On this premise, building human capital has been recognized and every effort is directed to building a strong, efficient and reliable teachers education in the country. Also the policy on the language section makes English language a compulsory subject of study at all levels of education. In addition the policy states that from the upper primary level English becomes the language of instruction for all the subjects in the school curriculum. As a result the English language has its dominance as the country’s lingua franca. Its position as a most revered and desired subject of the school curriculum remains unchallengeable.

Akabogu, (2004) observes that English language teaching and learning in Nigeria is beset with many problems which include lack of enough qualified English language teachers at both the primary and secondary school levels.

Discouraging as this situation may seem and considering the fact that achievement in English language is related to the quality of teacher and the quality of the

teaching there is therefore need to infuse ICT into the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian classrooms to enhance the quality of English language teachers in our school system.

The English Language Teacher and the Changing Context of Language Teaching

In Nigeria, most secondary school teachers lack the skills to fully utilize technology in curriculum implementation hence the traditional lecture, chalk and duster approach still dominates in secondary schools pedagogy. Anao (2003) posits that the use of ICT for information transfer is minimal or no existence in Nigerian secondary schools. The English language teachers are no exception to this situation. Secondary school teachers in Nigeria need to be trained in educational technologies and the integration of computers into classroom teaching. According to Carison and Firpo, (2001:107) “teachers need effective tools, techniques, and existence that can help them develop computer based project activities especially designed to raise the level of teaching in English and other subjects in the school curriculum.

In our school system, computer technology is important in all the activities geared towards achieving competency geared towards achieving competency in the teaching and learning of English as a second language. the modern English classroom has grown too large. As a result, the instruction cannot take care of the individual differences that exist among learners. Warschauer and Healey, (1998) observe that recent years have shown an explosion of interest in using computers for language teaching and learning.

According to the researchers, a decade ago, the use of computers in the language classroom was of concern only to a small number of specialists. However, with the advent of multimedia computing, and the Internet, the role of computers in language instruction has now become an important issue confronting large numbers of language teachers throughout the world. There is therefore need to increase the level of computer literacy of students as well as the teachers of ESL towards achieving the gains of ICT in language teaching and learning.

The Need for Computer Assisted Language Instruction

Although the potential of the Internet for educational use has not been fully explored yet and the average school still makes limited use of computers in language teaching and learning, it is obvious however, that we have entered a new information age in which the links between technology and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have already been established.

Computers have been used for language teaching ever since the 1960's: The reasons for using computer assisted language learning (CALL) include:

- Experimental learning
- Motivation
- Enhance students achievement
- Authentic materials for study greater interaction
- Individualization
- Independence from a single source of information
- Global understanding

Research and practice suggest that, appropriately implemented network- based can contribute significantly to:

Experimental Learning: The world wide web makes it possible for students to tackle a huge amount of human experience, in such a way, they can learn by doing themselves. They become creators not just the receivers of knowledge as the way information is presented is not linear, users develop thinking skills and choose what to explore.

Motivation: Computers are most popular among students either because they are associated with fun and games or because they are considered to be fashionable. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered, which make them feel more independent.

Enhanced Student Achievement

Network based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude by helping them build self instruction strategies and promote their self confidence.

Authentic Materials for Study

All students can use various resources of authentic reading materials either at school or from their home.

Independence from a single source of Information

Although students can still use their books, they are given the chance to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfils the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world.

Global Understanding

A foreign language is studied in a cultural context. In a world where the use of the internet becomes more and more, wide spread, an English language teachers' duty is to facilitate students access to the web and make them feel citizens of a global classroom, practicing communication on a global level. There are also computer softwares developed for teaching the different language skills for example the Microsoft word Office 2003 can be used to teach the speech sounds of English and prosody. The programme is adequate for this because it can indicate both right and wrong pronunciations when activated. It has the capacity to show when a learner pronounces words correctly and the computer will write them correctly but if the pronunciation is wrong the system will show a wrong word. The system is effective in teaching pronunciation and spelling all at the same time. The Microsoft word for windows can be used in the teaching and learning of grammar. The application package using Microsoft office edition 2003, the computer will correct the use of redundancy, tautology, inappropriate use of punctuation marks, correction of grammatical errors. In all these the software will detect and underline all such errors and provide options for the inbuilt dictionaries.

On the other hand, the Internet and the rise of computer mediated communication have re-shaped the uses of computers for language learning. The recent shift to global information-based economies means that students will need to learn how to deal, with large amount of information and have to be able to communicate across languages and cultures. Akabogu, (2009). At the same time the role of the teacher has changed as well, teachers are not the only source of information anymore, but at as facilitators so that students can actively interpret and organize the information they are given fitting it into prior knowledge Pole et al, (1991). Students have become active

participants in learning and are encouraged to be explorers and creators of language rather than passive recipients of it Brown, (1991).

Barriers to ICT Utilization in English Language Teaching

The utilization of ICT facilities in the teaching of English language in Nigeria is faced with a lot of problems. The first and most fundamental of all these is the high rate of computer illiteracy among the English language teachers across the different levels of education. Otagburuagu and Eze (2006) asserts that computer awareness is still a new dawn in our educational system and therefore the extent to which it can be used in teaching and learning is limited. Next is the non availability of computer hardware and soft ware as a result of financial difficulties. The cost of procuring and installing ICT facilities is enormous particularly in a country like Nigeria with attendant economic difficulties.

There is also the attitude problem as people often show strong aversion for change even where facilities are in abundance. Okunbole (2002) is of the opinion that the problem might not be the funds nor the technology but rather, the will on the part of government and /or the governors of education to promote the use of ICT.

There is also the problem of manpower with technical and theoretical knowledge to implement and educate people on the use of ICT facilities where available.

Finally, there is the problem of computer illiteracy among the learners, most of the students are not computer literate. ICT/Computer Assisted Language instruction will demand an awareness on the part of the students.

Way forward and Conclusion

The infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the English language teaching and learning in this era of ICT is very imperative. ICT has influence virtually in all aspects of life and education is not exceptional. Also in view of the fact that quality of teacher correlates with student achievement (Hammoined, 2002), there is need to promote the use of ICT in the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria to enhance students achievement in the subject. In most countries of the world, the role of technology as a resource for teaching and learning the second language is increasing as educators recognize its ability to create both independent and collaborative learning environments in which the students can learn the new language. The time has come for Nigeria to join the global trend in language teaching and learning. To accomplish this task a few things have to be put in place.

- ❖ Education authorities and curriculum planners must include ICT as a major resource for teaching in our schools.
- ❖ Basic ICT, facilities must be provided in all the schools for the teaching of English language.
- ❖ Workshops and training programmes must be mounted for mass education of teachers and students to acquire computer literacy.
- ❖ English language teachers need to change their traditional methods of theory based language teaching to embrace and imbibe a more pragmatic, activity based method of language teaching through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and other ICT facilities.

Conclusively, the fore-going are strong indicatives that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can help bring about change in the quality of teachers and instruction in English Language teaching in Nigeria schools. The world is now a global village through the magic of ICT. This also applies to language teaching and

learning. ESL teachers in the country are encouraged to infuse ICT as part of their pedagogical culture in the content of the ICT driven world which they are part of.

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