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## **The Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) in Foreign Language Teaching in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

The integration of information and communication technologies into foreign language teaching/learning has become indispensable, nay imperative, in today's teaching and learning environment. This is so as computer literacy, together with reading and writing literacy are generally considered as skills needed by students to succeed in today's technologically developed world. Furthermore, modern technologies are generally viewed as having potentials of impacting and revolutionizing the teaching and learning of all academic subjects. In Nigeria, the use of ICTs in secondary and tertiary educational institutions is more of a myth than a reality and this has caused the traditional approach to principally be considered in language teaching in schools within the Federation. This paper explored some of the negative effects of this traditional approach, particularly to foreign language teaching. It also examined the prospects and challenges facing the use of ICTs in foreign language teaching in Nigeria. It argued that ICTs have the potentials of improving the quality of language teaching and learning and of facilitating access to such teaching and learning. It also has the potentials of enhancing language competence and learners' interaction among others. However, this modernist approach is faced with challenges such as ineffective education policies,

absence of ICT facilities in schools, overcrowded classrooms and erratic power supply among others.

**Key words:** Information Communication Technology (ICT), Educational Technology, Foreign Language Teaching, Multimedia

### Introduction

The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education is generally acknowledged as a catalyst in the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge in all academic disciplines. No doubt, a number of modern educationists have ascribed a great deal of importance to such a use. These educationists regard ICTs as having the potentials to improve teaching and learning in addition to shaping workforce opportunities (BECTA 2014; Adamu-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu 2005; Akamu 2009; Richardson and Lenarcic 2009; Apanpa and Oluranti 2012). By facilitating knowledge acquisition and by revolutionizing teaching and learning, the use of ICTs in education has become a prerequisite to a viable global economic development. Conscious of this importance (the relevance of ICTs), most developed countries have adopted policies aimed at integrating these new technologies to education (Randall 2006; Visscher et al 2003; Thierer 2000; Rosen and Well 1995; Poole 1996). Indeed, since the years 1980's, most of the western (developed) countries have sought to equip their schools with computers and other new education technologies – as well as with highly qualified human resources – in view of producing technologically proficient and efficient students in all fields of knowledge (Rosen and Well 1995, Poole 1996). In line with this, the use of ICTs holds immense promises to enhance foreign language (FL) teaching and learning. In effect, the integration of information and communication technologies into foreign language teaching/learning is viewed as indispensable – nay imperative – in today's teaching and learning environment. This is so as computer literacy – together with reading and writing literacy – are generally considered as skills needed by students to succeed in today's technologically developed world.

However, in contemporary Nigeria, the use of ICTs in education is more a myth than a reality. The traditional approach to language teaching is still prevalent in most secondary and tertiary school institution within the country (Vlatonu and Kayode 2013; Adamu and Iyamu 2005; Apanpa and Oluranti 2012). The use of this relatively backward approach to foreign language education is not without very negative impacts on student performance in the subject. As Akawu (2009:89) insightfully notes, “the result is that children [foreign language learners) find schools to be much less stimulating than the multi-sensory world outside of school”. Akawu (2009) further notes that the use of ICTs may not be an absolute cure to all problems caused by the traditional approach to foreign language teaching “but early indicators attest that it can help to restructure our classrooms with effective tools for developing active learning, open inquiry and interpretative skills”. This paper explores some of the negative effects

of the traditional approach to teaching and learning foreign languages and presents the prospect of the use of ICTs in foreign language teaching in Nigeria. It equally explores the challenges faced by this modernist approach in Nigeria.

### **Education Technology in Nigeria**

The Nigerian government has adopted a number of policies and projects ultimately aimed at developing educational technology in the country. These policies have given birth to such governmental bodies as the National Educational Technology Center (NETEC) and the Nigerian Audio-Visual Association (NAVA) today's Nigerian Association for Educational Media and Technology (NAEMT). The NETEC has as duties:

- To give consistent service in the field of education technology to the federal and state government as well as individual institutions
- Organize workshops, seminars, conferences and the like in (re)training teachers in the implementation of educational technology in teaching/learning environments
- To train resource personnel, individuals in the various means of promotion towards the betterment of educational system
- Establish and maintain instructional media facilities in schools and other institutions within the national territory (Akawu 2009, Apapa and Oluranti 2012; Awoyemi 2013).

In 1988, the Nigerian Government equally enacted the Policy on Computer Education. This policy was aimed at establishing pilot schools in which ICT will be used in teaching and learning methodologies and diffuse the innovation, first to all secondary schools and then to the primary schools. Though commendable, these various governmental initiatives towards developing educational technology did not really take off ground (International Telecommunication Union 2009; Okebukola 1997, p. 16; Adamu-Ogeagbean and Iyamu 2005, p.105; Vladonu and Kayode 2013, p. 97). Adamu-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005, p.104) make an assessment of these various Governmental initiatives when they concede that "Nigeria is on the wrong side of the international digital divide, as it has not made sufficient efforts to integrate ICTs into secondary school curriculum", the same as in language teaching in particular. Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa – UNECA (2006) reviews the country's efforts towards integrating ICT to education (especially language education). It makes the following diagnostics:

- Electricity, phone lines, internet facilities are either unreliable or expensive.

- Video recorders and other ICTs are locked in storage closets because only few teachers know how to operate and incorporate them into their instructional programs
- ICT trained teachers often quit teaching for more lucrative jobs because teaching is not attractive especially in Nigeria
- Where provided, the existing ICT gadgets are poorly maintained and this is a debilitating factor against the use of ICTs in language education.
- There are no language and computer laboratories in virtually all schools in Nigeria.

Recent studies by Nwangwu et al (2014, p. 95) and Bhukuvhani et al (2013) revealed that, for some years now, the Nigerian Government has made some relatively remarkable efforts in furnishing some of the country's secondary schools with ICT facilities. In line with this it is documented that the Federal Government of Nigeria has invested over 1.32 billion Naira in building and equipping ICT laboratories in about 102 schools within the country. Governmental efforts are consolidated by the corporation of some non-governmental forces. These non-governmental actors include private sectors organizations, ministries, principals, parents, communities, teacher education institutions (Olibie & Akudolu 2009). However, despite the presence of these ICT laboratories in some of country's schools, ICT has not still been perfectly integrated into the teaching of subjects other than computer studies. Furthermore, the availability of these facilities (ICT laboratories) even in some universities in the country, does not imply that computers and other vital ICT tools are readily accessible by teachers and students, especially in language studies. In some schools, these modern didactic tools may be available just in laboratories and offices, without them being very operational for any class. Olibie and Akudolu (2009, p. 246) corroborate this fact, with respect to the situation of secondary schools in Anambra State of Nigeria:

Concerned with ensuring ICT availability in schools, the *National Policy on Education* [...] stated that government shall provide facilities and infrastructures necessary for the promotion of ICT in schools. The government has gone ahead to implement this through school computer initiatives like the School Net program [...] The Anambra State government had also made a key effort in this regard by providing computers to several secondary schools in the State. But the sad story is that many of the secondary schools that received these computers do not use them for either administrative or curriculum purposes. [...] Informal interactions with some of the principals and teachers of schools that received these computers indicated that the computers are not in use because of lack of electricity, inadequate space, leaking roofs and broken windows in the places where they

could have been kept [...] One is therefore worried that it is not enough to supply computers to schools only for the schools to fail to use them.

Other reasons that can be advanced for the non-utilization of these facilities include the lack of staff competencies on computer use and lack of technical support for the installation and use of such facilities. Besides, the provision of computers need to be complemented with other crucial accessories like the Internet, digital audios, interactive whiteboards, satellites, and software were lacking. All these complementary tools often represent serious challenges to the use of the ICT laboratories.

All these barriers to the effective use of ICTs in education in general and language education in particular has caused many teachers to resort to the traditional approach to education. The traditional method has thus become a “culture” which, unfortunately, is transmitted from generation to generation in the country’s educational environment. Akawu (2009, p. 89) corroborated this fact when he submits that “All too often, we [foreign language educators] teach as we were taught: many schools continue to emphasize the same instructional strategy (lecture) and technique (chalkboard) as schools of the 1920’s”. The traditional approach, of course, has an avalanche of disadvantages, the most obvious being that the foreign language classes are less stimulating, and the teaching is more teacher centered and less learner centered as FL teaching is, in such a context mainly restricted to “all the teacher has to say to the learners, a situation which makes the learner inactive in the teaching-learning situation” (Vlatonu & Kayode 2013).

Critics view the prevalence of the traditional method in (language) education in Nigeria as one of the multiple ugly consequences of inefficient Government policies on education and lack of political will. Adamu-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005, p.106) noted for instance that the chalkboard and textbook approach to language education continues to dominate classroom activities in most schools within the country because Government fails to place ICTs and education technologies in the priorities of the country’s development needs.

If a country such as Uganda which has less than a-fifth of Nigeria’s resources is now using information and communication technology to help secondary school students to become better information users, why is Nigeria lagging behind? The answer is simply mismanagement of the huge resources of the country and inability of political leaders to prioritize Nigeria’s developmental needs (Adamu-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu 2005, p.106).

There is, therefore, the need for the Nigerian Government to see the potentials of ICTs in knowledge acquisition and effectively integrate them in the teaching and learning of all subjects in general and in language education in particular. ICTs should be viewed as indispensable aids to teaching and learning foreign languages.

### ICTs in Foreign Language Teaching

The use of ICTs in language education can be viewed as an aspect of the lively communicative method. This method (the communicative approach) extensively combines high quality content with flexible and interactive multimedia technology (Madhavi 2010, Okom & Gogura 2007). The use of ICTs in foreign language teaching/learning is equally part of the computer assisted language learning (CALL). This approach enables the development of computer based activities aimed at facilitating learner-computer and learner-learner interactions engaging the learner in a wide range of communicative tasks. In this approach, the computer and the internet (the hypermedia) can be used as instruments for understanding and using language through spelling and grammar checkers, desktop editing programs (Padurean and Margan 2009, p. 98; Kalnina and Kangro 2007, p. 105; Akawu 2009, p. 88). The CALL approach is more efficient when implemented in supplement/complement of the traditional method.

In a foreign language classroom, the hypermedia can play diverse roles including that of teacher, tester, tool (to assist students do certain tasks), data source and communication facilitator. As a teacher, the computer and the internet can facilitate a wide range of practical activities. Such programs as the CD ROMS provide excellent listening comprehension exercises. Through these exercises, students can listen to recordings, watch videos, speak into the microphone, record their progress or learn phonetics and the structures of words by clicking on pictures and hearing their pronunciation. Such listening comprehension and speaking exercises can equally be done with the intelligent use of the World Wide Web.

As a tester, the computer can enable students to evaluate their understanding of already learned structures and topics. Different websites can be used here for practical activities in the understanding of the learned foreign language. These practical exercises may include multi-choice (true or false or dual choice) exercises. Computer assisted testing provides an excellent opportunity to test students' language and cognitive skills. They also facilitate self-test, through computer assisted instruction mechanisms.

Computers and the other hypermedia can equally serve as tools for acquiring a foreign language as they provide the foreign language learner or teacher with a wide range of multimedia resources that are indispensable aids to the learning process. These multimedia resources include graphics, sound, animations, video-audio material, websites, pictures and the like. These multimedia resources make the computer and the internet relatively reliable data sources. According to Padurean and Morgan (2009, p. 99), the computer and the internet permit access to almost all types of information a language learner or teacher may need in the teaching/learning process. With the guidance of the teacher, the students may surf the web to find out information as rapidly as possible and use this information for problem solving in FL classroom.

As a communication facilitator tool, the computer may be used to develop student-student interaction in and out of the FL classroom context. This can be done through didactic e-mails, creating of discussion forums on social networks (Facebook for instance). Such activities may be aimed at developing topics or subjects of interest in the FL. Such activities enable the students to particularly develop their reading and writing skills. When ICTs are used through such programs as LAN or telecommunication, cooperative writing activities are strong and excellent motivators to help students develop their writing skills (Akawu 2009, p. 88; Padurean and Morgan 2009, p. 99; Taiwo 2004).

### **Prospects of the Use of ICTs in FL Teaching in Nigeria**

There are immense prospects for the use of ICTs in FL teaching in Nigeria. One of these prospects is ICTs' capacity to improve the quality of FL teaching and learning through revolutionizing the traditional approach to language education. In principle, the CALL approach is based on the use of a wide range of hypermedia which have ample advantages over the book. The hypermedia combines visual with listening materials, text with graphics and pictures. This type of media enables the teacher have greater control over his presentation (lesson) in class. Connected to this factor is the fact that, contrarily to the textbook approach in which series of classes are often centered on the same topic, the Call approach permits teachers to use different materials for each lesson. Further, computer programs and relevant teaching softwares have greater flexibility and adaptability. The teacher can, for instance, adapt teaching software to their students' needs, realities and level of language. Such adaptability is relatively impossible in the textbook approach as book contents are often presented in a single and uniform format. The contents of textbooks are equally often taught irrespective of students' problems (Paduraen & Morgan 2009, p.100).

Another prospect is that the ICT based teaching/learning offers greater opportunities for immediate feedback from students. The computer generally provides a fast feedback to student's answers spotting and correcting mistakes through its correction mechanism. Some word processors are even bilingual and conceived to provide immediate online assistance to users, as well as are equipped with dictionaries, spell checkers and grammar helps which enhance interaction and (self) evaluation in FL teaching/learning situation.

The use of ICTs can also facilitate individual learning. Being a learner-centered approach to language education, the CALL method gives the learner a greater control over his/her learning of the language. The learner can therefore determine the pace of the learning process as well as select/skip some parts of the text or revise the difficult parts of the lessons. This may help surmount the problem of large classes and divergent and individual learning styles which is prevalent in Nigerian schools. The use of the hypermedia also makes the language class a livelier experience and enhances

pedagogical practices as it enables both the teacher and the learners to change their respective roles. The student takes more responsibility for his/her learning while the teacher assumes the role of a guide and information manager who orients an individualized learning process.

### **Challenges Facing the Use of ICTs in FL Teaching in Nigeria**

A number of factors serve as serious impediments to the effective use of ICTs in foreign language education. These factors include cost of ICTs, lack of skills to use these technologies, irregular power supply and limited access to the internet among others. The costs of ICTs, especially computer software and hardware are still very exorbitant in Nigeria. This makes these technologies not to be easily accessible and affordable by most secondary and even tertiary institutions in the country. Similarly, most schools cannot afford the high fees needed for internet connection and other accessories. Also, most foreign language educators are still to be trained in the use of these new technologies in classroom practices. Most FL language educators are more conversant with the traditional method. It is not even uncommon to still note a degree of computer illiteracy among language teachers. In line with this, Vlanotu and Kayode (2013) noted that “the success or failure of a teaching-learning situation in language acquisition rests to a large extent on the teacher. However, it has been discovered that many teachers are yet to upgrade or familiarize themselves with ICT and its application in the classroom setting”.

It is also important to note the negative attitude some language educators have towards the use of ICT in class context. To some FL educators, the continuous use of these new technologies in language education may create a situation in which teachers will no longer be needed in the classroom as their role will be taken over by computers (Adamu-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu 2006; Paduraen & Morgan 2009; Taiwo 2004). Another serious challenge to the use of ICTs in FL education is the limited access to the internet in Nigeria due to limited number of internet providers. In effect, Nigerians depend on few internet providers. These few internet providers are affiliated to foreign information and communication companies which are not always reliable. These mostly companies offer a very poor service. The very few reliable internet providers charge very high charges for their services. All these factors make it difficult for schools to enjoy internet connection and use it for language teaching.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has acknowledged that the integration of information and communication technologies in foreign language teaching/learning is becoming indispensable – nay imperative – in today’s teaching and learning environment. This imperativeness is owing to the fact that computer literacy – together with reading and writing literacy – are generally considered as skills needed by students to succeed in today’s technologically developed world. The imperativeness of the use of ICTs in FL teaching

is equally owing to the fact that modern technologies are generally credited with powers to impact and revolutionize teaching and learning of all academic subjects.

In Nigeria, the use of ITCs in secondary and tertiary educational institutions is more a myth than a reality. Despite numerous education policies and projects aimed at developing educational technologies, the country still needs enormous efforts and investment for the use of ICTs in education to be a reality. The Nigerian Government and other non-governmental stakeholders/actors have made some contribution to enhance ICT use in secondary and tertiary school institutions within the countries. However, much is still to be done. The Government has, for instance, invested over 1.32 Billion by 2013 for the building and equipping of ICT laboratories in about 102 schools in the country. However, despite the presence of these ICT laboratories in some schools, ICT has generally not been fully integrated into the teaching of subjects other than computer science, this for multiple technical and intellectual reasons. In many schools, ICT tools are mostly available just in laboratories and offices. Student and teachers have limited or no access to these ICT facilities and teaching/learning is compelled under such circumstances to be done principally through the traditional method.

Therefore, for the main time, the traditional approach to education is still highly considered in language teaching in schools within the Federation. This paper explored some of the negative effects of this traditional approach to foreign language teaching. It argued that the traditional method renders the FL class less lively and glorifies the elevation of the FL teacher to the role of an authoritative source. The paper also examined the prospects and challenges facing the use of ICTs in foreign language teaching in Nigeria. It argued that ICTs have potentials of improving the quality of language teaching and learning and of facilitating access to such teaching and learning. It also has the potentials of enhancing language competence and learners' interaction among others. However, this modernist approach is faced with challenges such as ineffective education policies, absence of ICT facilities in schools, overcrowded classrooms and erratic power supply.

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