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General Overview of the Use of ICT in the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages

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General Overview of the Use of ICT in the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The application of information and communication technology (ICT) to the teaching and learning of foreign languages has come a long way in the field of foreign language education. A good number of foreign language software developed by language software developers have been underutilized by foreign language teachers, thereby resulting to poor performance and attrition in foreign language learning, most especially in the developing countries of the world. This problem cannot be divorced from teachers' level of technical competence, availability and accessibility of computer and ICT facilities in schools and the attitude of foreign language teachers to the use of modern technology as an intervention in the foreign language classroom.

In this paper however, the researchers discussed the extent to which foreign language teachers are reluctant to change from the conventional method of foreign language teaching in spite of the numerous advantages inherent in the use of ICT facilities and computer software in foreign language learning. We gave the general overview of the application, the use and the resultant effect of the information and communication technology (ICT) and language software in enhancing the foreign language skills in the learners. It was therefore concluded that the significance of using ICT facilities in the teaching and learning of foreign languages is unquantifiable.

Keywords: Foreign language, ICT, Language software

Résumé

Les TIC sont de nos jours monnaie courante dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères. Un nombre de logiciels de langue mise au point par les développeurs ont été sous-utilisés par les enseignants de langues étrangères, entraînant ainsi de faibles résultats et l'attrition dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères, surtout dans les pays en voie de développement. Le problème se rattache au niveau de la compétence technique des enseignants, la disponibilité et l'accès aux ordinateurs et aux matériels informatiques dans les établissements scolaires ainsi que l'attitude des enseignants par rapport à l'usage des technologies modernes dans les classes de langue étrangère. Dans cette communication, les chercheurs présentent l'envergure de la réticence des enseignants de langue étrangère envers le changement de la méthode conventionnelle de l'enseignement de langue étrangère malgré les nombreux avantages inhérents à l'usage des équipements et des logiciels informatiques dans l'apprentissage de langue étrangère. Nous faisons un survol de l'application, l'usage et les effets de l'informatique et des logiciels de langue dans l'amélioration des compétences des apprenants en langue étrangère. En conclusion, l'importance de l'usage des équipements informatiques dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage des langues étrangères est inestimable.

Mots-clés: langue étrangère, TIC, logiciels pour les langues

Introduction

The application of information and communication technology (ICT) to the teaching of foreign languages has come under different names or appellations and it has spanned several decades. Experts in the field of modern languages have used such terms as computer assisted language instruction (CALI), computer assisted language learning (CALL), technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), computer mediated communication (CMC) and mobile- assisted language learning (MALL).

1. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) versus Foreign Language Education

At the inception of the introduction of computer to the teaching and learning of foreign languages, emphasis was laid on such activities as traditional drills and practice which was purely teacher-centered approach where instruction is more pronounced than learning. In the recent past however, attention has been shifted to students-centered approach focusing on learning rather than instruction which gives the students room to work independently of the teacher. Bates (2005) affirmed that the introduction of new learning technologies, the fast expansion of the internet and the introduction of the World Wide Web (www) have made momentous changes in education.

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) connotes the use of devices such as desktop computers, Laptop, software or internet for instructional purposes. The application of technology to language teaching and learning takes its root from the earlier use of Audio-tapes, word processing and CD-Rom. The new advancement in technology and ICT facilities have made it practicable for learners of foreign languages to perform such activities as internet browsing, on-line interaction with peers and people of similar interest using computers mediated communication (CMC) such as chat video, teleconferencing, whiteboard discussion forum, social networking sites, e-mails and other forms of technology including blogs, Wikis and MP3 (Murray, 2005). One cannot underestimate the significant values and benefits inherent in the use of the ICT facilities in the language classrooms. This affords the learners the opportunity to interact with one another and also with the language teacher thereby creating a virtual learning environment (VLE). It brings authenticity into foreign language learning situation whereby the learners would have access to authentic materials and they would be able to combine the four major language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in communication. It could be used for content management and examination servicing. The new development in the conduct of the entrance examination into tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the use of computer in the conduct of the examination otherwise referred to as Computer Based Test (CBT). Even though the innovative idea was initially greeted with stiff criticism by stakeholders in the field of Education in Nigeria, it has now been embraced by all and sundry.

The attitude of teachers to new technological innovations introduced into the system of education calls for concern. The attitude of foreign language teachers to the use of ICT facilities in language class is not encouraging. Virkus (2008) observed that technology based

learning in foreign language instruction is slow and faced with reticence by many teachers due to lack of awareness, more comfort with text environment, deficient computer literacy and contentedness that technology alone does not deliver educational success.

To further elucidate on the relative value of ICT facilities in foreign language class, Lindstrom (1994) is of the view that people remember 20% of what they see, (40%) of what they see and hear and 75% of what they see, hear and do simultaneously. It should be noted that the use of multimedia is effective in enhancing productivity and retention rate.

The use of multimedia resources has tremendous impact on language as affirmed by Oshinaike A. B. & Adekinnusi S. R. (2012). They are of the opinion that the conventional media technologies can no longer meet the needs of our teaching and learning processes and have now been replaced by multimedia technology. The advantage of using multimedia technology ranges from the provision of a self-paced learning environment, learner controlled and individualized instruction.

The use of multimedia in teaching and learning is not a new phenomenon. In a study conducted by Uboqu (2006), the researcher reported that multimedia resources facilitate access to all human knowledge anytime and anywhere in a friendly, multi-modal, efficient and effective way by overcoming barriers of distance, language and culture and by using multiple internet-connect devices. Multimedia communication include computer hard wares, computer software, public address systems, slides, overhead projectors, opaque projectors, videos, cassettes, audio tapes, cassette recorders, flip, time sequences, stream charts, Diorama, still motion pictures among others.

These multimedia resources have been used in the past by foreign language educators but with the advancement in technology, some of these multimedia resources have become outdated, obsolete and unfashionable. Many of them have been replaced with ICT facilities that are now considered modern instructional media in teaching and learning process. Hoffman (2001) suggested that successful implementation of ICTs needs to address five interlocking frameworks for change namely: the infrastructures, attitude, staff development support (chemical and administrative) and sustainability and transferability. These four cogent areas in the use of ICT for teaching and learning of foreign language should not be undermined. In spite of the availability of information and communication technology facilities in the foreign language class, the teachers need technical competence to be able to use the facilities. Some teachers are of the traditional and conventional type as they exhibit ineptitude to change or new technological innovation in teaching and learning process. They

prefer to stick strictly to their conventional mode of instructional delivery rather than embrace the new technology. The phobia or aversion for the use of technological innovation may debar the school authorities from procuring ICT facilities for use in the teaching –learning process. This is highly common in developing countries where the level of poverty and economic deprivation is very high. There is need for attitudinal change on the part of the foreign language teachers in the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The modern technologies (e-mail, Conferences and virtual classes) allow students to interact with other students and to use French while speaking about common objective (Giurgiu, I and Zamfirescu, R, 2007). There is no doubt that the use of modern technologies in a foreign language class helps to stimulate the interest of the principal actors in the teaching learning process i.e. the teacher and the learners. The major modern technologies in use in modern language class are e-mall, conferencing system and virtual classes which allow the students to interact with both the students and the teachers alike. The introduction of these technologies has brought about a revolution into the methods and approaches of the teaching of foreign languages. There are various ways by which internet facilities can be used to impart foreign language skills into the learner. These techniques shall be discussed briefly.

-The use of interactive platform is one of the techniques of teaching foreign languages. The teacher can create an account and a password for individual member of the class. The students post their assignment to the teacher and the teacher on the other hand sends the corrected work back to the students.

-The teacher can engage the students to work on some interesting topics which would be placed on the internet for other students to read. This could be done in form of a term paper which requires the students to be divided into groups. Each group works on a topic and this would be placed on the internet after the teacher must have corrected and assessed it.

-The use of power point presentation is another form of introducing technology into the foreign language class. The power point can be used to present course materials or seminars relating to the foreign language. It could also be used to present film that dwells on the culture and civilization of the target language community.

-On- line radio channels can also be of immense benefit to students in enhancing their foreign language skills. The teacher has to be conversant with the on-line radio channels of the foreign language community. The addresses of these

channels could be made available to the students so that they can follow interesting and educative programmes such as cuisine, news, contests, music etc on the radio. The teacher and the students can discuss or comment on these programmes in the classroom situation.

Computer assisted language learning has been in place since 1960. There are quite a number of programmes available on the internet designed for learning foreign languages. Some of these programmes are sold for a stipulated amount of money while some could be accessed free of charge. Researchers have studied the development in CALL and its impact on language learning over the years, i.e. (Sanders, 1995, Delcolque, 2000, Hubbard, 2009). The use of computer assisted language learning (CALL) in foreign language learning dwells on the synergy between two distinct fields of study i.e. educational technology and second and foreign language acquisition.

The primary focus of computer assisted language learning is on individualized language learning where the learners can learn the foreign language on their own and at their own pace without much assistance from their pairs or the teacher. It serves as remedial or supportive materials to complement the foreign language instructions received by learners in the classroom. The design of CALL is based on learning theories which include the behaviorist, Cognitive and constructivist theory. Different computer programmes have been designed by language experts to address certain instructional activities in the foreign language class such as Cloze programs, multiple choice programs, free format programs, adventures and simulations, action mazes, sentence-re-ordering programs, exploratory programs. Some of these programs still exist and majority of them have been modernized.

2.A three-phase approach

However, computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been classified according to the underlying pedagogical and methodological approaches. The three major classes according to Warschauer (2000) are behavioristic CALL, communicative CALL and integrative CALL.

Under the behaviouristic CALL, the interaction between the computer and the learner is based on the stimulus and response dichotomy. The computer presents the stimulus while the learners respond by providing the response. The computer analyses their input and gives immediate feedback. In some instances, where the programme is highly sophisticated, the learner can be referred to the remedial section where mistakes made can be instantaneously

addressed before the learner could proceed on the programme. This learning system is time saving and gives the learner emotional stability and psychological balance in the learning process. The efficacy of immediate feedback is self-motivation and impactful on the morale of the learners. Unlike in the normal conventional method, the behaviouristic approach to CALL is based on pattern drills and practice since the behaviourists consider language as a behaviour and learners are expected to be induced into the behaviour through pattern practice. The historical phase of behavioristics CALL in language learning spanned the period of 1950's to 1970's.

The second phase is communicative CALL which was prominent between 1970's and 1980's. It is based on using the language in communication rather than the analysis of the language. Grammar is taught implicitly rather than explicitly. Under this approach, the major activities the learners engage in include paced reading, text reconstruction and language games. Under this approach, the computer remains the tutor. The computer provides the context in which the learners use the language in communication. The major advantage derivable from the communicative CALL is the fact that it gives room for originality and flexibility.

The third phase is the integrative CALL which was dated back to 1990's. This approach made improvement on the criticism against the communicative approach by integrating language skills into tasks and project in a coherent and directional manner. The period coincided with the development of multi-media technology providing text, graphics, sound and animation as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC). There is a shift from using the computer to teach pattern drills or language tutorial classes to using the computer as a medium of extending education beyond the framework of the classroom.

There are a number of technological media which could be used to disseminate language instructions. The media emerged over the years and have undergone transformation on the face of technological development. These media technologies will be considered briefly:

-The use of flashcards which is specifically geared towards the acquisition of vocabularies in the foreign language. This program establishes a link between memorization of vocabulary items and retention. The learners are presented with vocabulary items which are required to be committed to memory at a particular interval until a long term memory is achieved. The development in language learning

software marked another era in the computer-mediated approach to foreign language learning. These tools are designed based on the latest pedagogical and methodological approach to foreign language learning. A quite number of approaches have emerged over the years which made meaningful impact on the teaching and learning of foreign or second language. The methods are direct method, audio-lingual method, Grammar translation method and the communicative language teaching method. The features of these methods have served as guiding principles for language software developers. The language software developers should bear in mind that the primary aim of developing a language learning software is to allow the learners to be autonomous and independent as much as possible as opposed to the normal classroom system where the learners are passive participants and rely on the teacher for knowledge. The teacher should only play the role of a facilitator but not a purveyor of knowledge. This idea is based on the constructionist theory which maintains that learners should have the opportunity to construct their knowledge based on their previous experience but not a passive recipient of knowledge.

-The use of multimedia in the teaching of foreign languages should not be undermined. In the history of foreign language teaching and learning, the use of media as supporting tools is a historical phenomenon. Media such as Gramophone records, Broadcast from foreign radio, reel-to-reel tape recorders, slide projectors, film-strip projectors, video cassette recorders and DVD players have played prominent roles in inculcating the basic skills of language into the learners. At the earlier introduction of multimedia into language learning, language programs are published on CD-ROM or DVD but lately web-based multimedia CALL has overtaken the earlier use of CD-ROM and DVD. However, the management of multi-media centre does not only require availability of competent language teachers but also a personnel equipped with the technical know-how to handle the technical aspect of the programme because multimedia language teaching involves integration of text, images, sound and video that may appear too technical for a language teacher to handle. The situation is similar to the level of under-utilization of language laboratory due to lack of technical competence on the part of the teachers during the introduction of the equipment in the 1970s.

-Lastly, the use of internet facilities in foreign language learning cannot be over-emphasized. Since the invention of this technology in early 90s both the language teachers and the students make optimal use of the facility for language teaching and development. There are over 500 websites where learners can log into in order to access on-line exercises, dictionaries, encyclopedias, concordancers and translation aids. Apart from the services earlier mentioned which are accessible through the internet, the language teachers can also lay their hands on such applications as image storage and sharing, social book marking, chat rooms, animation tools, audio tools i.e comic strips, movies etc.

The use of ICT facilities in the teaching and learning process has become a global phenomenon. African countries have experienced decline in the use of ICT facilities in the school system due to the technology gap between the developed and the developing countries of the world. There is no doubt that the use of ICT in the teaching and learning process engenders qualitative learning. The use of ICT facilities in foreign language class will surely revolutionize the approaches and methodology of foreign language teaching and learning apart from the motivational impact it would have on both the foreign language teachers and the students alike. Despite this new technological innovation ADEA cited by Leary & Berge (2007) conclude that print continues to be a primary delivery method despite advances in connectivity and increased access to new information and communication technologies (ICT).

3. Advantages of using ICT facilities in foreign language class

There are many ICT facilities that could be used to develop language competence in the learners. Such facilities include CD-ROMS, Computer, Television, Radio, internet, Mp3 Players, CDS/DVDS, cell phones, language laboratory. All these technologies can be harnessed to inculcate foreign language skills into the learners. It enhances the quality of teaching and learning in foreign language class and it also encourage learners' participation in the language class.

In spite of the value inherent in integrating technology into the teaching- learning process, the foreign language teacher' competence is a determining factor in the effective use of computer and ICT facilities in foreign language class. The teacher must be trained in the use of ICT facilities in the teaching -learning process. A good number of language teachers are conservative and traditional in their approach to the teaching of foreign languages. They find it difficult to adapt to the pace of development in the technological world. This is highly

prevalent among the third world countries where access to technology still remains a mirage because of the level of poverty and the poor socio-economic status. This problem of lack of technical competence has found its way into the foreign language class. No matter the laudability of a technological innovation, we cannot rule out the concept of human intervention. Tinio (2007) reiterate that technology should not drive education rather educational goals, need and careful economics must drive technology.

Teachers of foreign languages should be ICT compliant and distance themselves from the traditional and conventional method of language teaching. One cannot undermine the relative value inherent in the use of modern technology in the foreign language teaching. Government could formulate policies that promote the use of ICT in education system. Teachers should be made to undergo training and update their knowledge in the use of modern technologies in the teaching of foreign languages.

Conclusion

There is urgent need to revolutionize the teaching and learning of foreign languages through the intervention of modern technologies such as information and communication technology and language software. The foreign language teachers should realize the fact that students need to be motivated through the use of modern technologies such as language software which allow learners to work independently of the teachers and go at their pace. It has been established that learners learn better when they learn on their own. Various methods of foreign languages teaching and learning have failed to yield positive results because they are teacher-centered. The language, culture and civilization and values of the target language community can be taught to the learners through the use of ICT intervention in the foreign language class.

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