

ADVANCING INNOVATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FROM THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT

For more than a year, the entire world had to learn how to manage the COVID-19 health pandemic unlike anything we have collectively experienced before. Without a doubt, the Corona virus adversely affected all aspects of human life. Businesses and institutions were temporarily forced to shut down and restriction on movement was imposed by governments all over the world. Only essential services providers were allowed to operate under strict observation of social-distancing rules to contain and control the spread of the virus. The onset of Covid-19 profoundly defines how we can safely live our lives. People everywhere learnt how to adjust accordingly to these unfamiliar and unusual circumstances. Changes became necessary so that risk can be minimized. As a result, the Nigerian system of education was negatively affected and the less privileged children suffered the brunt of it. Government introduced the e-learning as a remedy but it came with many challenges for the institutions of learning and students alike. Unfortunately, language education which is compulsory in the Nigerian school system was greatly hampered. This adversely affected the language teaching objectives in the country. This paper looks at the various interventions and policies of government as it partners other global entities and organizations, especially the online teaching as it affected language education, the challenges encountered and the prospects. The paper recommends among others adequate provision of fund to the educational system to put ICT resources in place in the institutions of learning and need to train teachers on how to integrate these ICT resources in their teaching and learning activities. If this is done, teaching and learning would be more effective. Teachers and learners would not be thrown of balance in the face a global pandemic such as Covid-19 in the future.

Key words: language education, Covid-19, government policies, e-learning, ICT resources

1. INTRODUCTION

The first case of the dreaded covid-19 pandemic was found in Wuhan, a region of China in December, 2019. Initially, most African countries including Nigeria were spared. There was no case recorded as at January, 2020. The first case of Covid-19 in Nigeria recorded and confirmed by February, 2020 was from a citizen of Italy returning to Nigeria from his country. 373 cases were recorded and confirmed within two months, among which 79 recovered and 11 died. At the beginning of the crisis, majority the African countries Nigeria inclusive channeled their responses on helping their stranded citizens in the affected region of China. This response quickly changed subsequently seeing that the pandemic was spreading into Nigeria as well as other African countries. Consequently, in a bid to curtail the spread of the pandemic, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Education, announced on the 19 of March the closure of all institutions of learning with effect from March 23, 2020. All students were asked to leave the school campuses bringing a sudden end to teaching and learning activities, thereby disorganizing the academic programmes of all the institutions of learning.

This drastic escalation of covid-19 did not only disrupt teaching and learning, it also compounded the already existing inequality in education in Nigeria, with the disadvantaged and vulnerable children mostly affected. The Nigerian government made frantic efforts to initiate measures that will ensure continuity, equity and inclusion of all category of learners in this period of crisis. The Federal Ministry of

Education introduced “free e-learning portals such as schoolgate.ng and mobileclassroom.com.ng as a way of tackle the social isolation caused by the covid-19 lockdown” (Adedigba, 2020)[1]. Adetona, Ogunyemi and Oduntan(2021) [2] assert that “many educational institutions in the country began, for the first time, to use various learning alternatives including using Google Classroom, YouTube videos, social media such as WhatsApp, email, dedicated institutional portals, etc. to deliver their curricula partly on the Internet (online) and offline. These various means of curricula delivery were termed as e-learning during the covid-19 lockdown. The e-learning activities were carried out by primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions with many challenges faced by the institution management, ICT staff, teachers and lecturers, and students alike”.

It should be noted that from inception till now in Nigeria, educational objectives have been achieved mainly through teaching and learning methodologies that are not technology based. This traditional method of teaching and learning requires physical encounter. Students are expected to carry out their academic activities in classrooms in physical structures under the strict guidance of their teachers. This implies that students must be on campus for any meaningful academic activity to take place.

However, the e-learning method adopted by the Nigerian educational system at all levels during the pandemic recorded minimal success. This innovation in teaching and learning could not thrive during the covid-19 era due to lack of constant power supply, “poor Internet connectivity, poor ICT infrastructures, high cost of electronic devices needed for e-learning, lack of trained personnel as well as lack of preparedness on the part of the institutions of learning, instructors and poorly motivated learners who were now forced to embrace the new way of learning” (Adetona, Ogunyemi and Oduntan, 2021). Language education suffered a big setback giving its importance in the socio-economic and political development of the Nation. English and French language education fit into the reality of globalization as they have been a critical issue in creating, enhancing and boosting the possible increase of efficiency and communicative competence needed for international communication and interaction. They need to be giving all attention it deserves by the relevant authorities at all times. On the other hand, the Nigerian indigenous languages which are the symbol of identity, national unity and integration must not be allowed to suffer. This paper therefore examines how language education can be made more effective and result oriented by employing the new technologies used in teaching and learning from the covid-19 experience. In doing this, it looks at the concept of language education in Nigeria, the effect of covid-19 on the language learning of the less privileged children, the concept of e-learning and the challenge of adopting e-learning during the pandemic. It also looks at how ICT resources can be integrated into language teaching and learning in Nigeria.

2. CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Fanfunwa (1979) cited in Iffih (1989)[3] defines “education as the aggregate of all the process by which a child or an adult develops the abilities and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in he lives, that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee national direction of the society or of both. Going by this definition of education, language education is thus the process by which a child develops the communicative attitude which is of positive value to his society. In other words, language education is the formal acquisition or learning communicative skills”.

Language education means teaching and learning of a language. It is a part of applied linguistics. “Applied linguistics offers solutions to language related real life problems. There are four main learning categories for language education: communicative competence, proficiencies, cross-cultural experiences, and multiple literacies” (Wikipedia)[4].

Language is an important tool in the society. It is the vehicle of knowledge and also transmission of culture. Members of the society use written and spoken language to communicate with each other, effective communication being important to ensure national harmony, political stability and economic development.

Effective language education will promote social interaction and national cohesion and respect for diversity. Without effective communication, we cannot talk of national harmony. Development will be farfetched. To support this assertion, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004)[5] states that “Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expected that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school.”

For the objectives of language education to be attained, the teachers of language must be innovative. They must be ready to integrate the new technologies into their methodology. The covid-19 pandemic brought this reality into limelight when it became obvious that for teaching and learning to continue, teachers have to devise a means of reaching out to the students outside the four walls of the regular classroom. Suffice to say educational achievement was at its lowest level all through the period of the pandemic. Little or nothing was achieved because of lack of skilled manpower and poor technological infrastructure. It also important to mention here that the fact that most learners were being exposed to the use of the new technologies for the first time contributed immensely to the low educational achievement recorded during the pandemic. Okagbue, Ezechikulo, Nchekwubenchukwu, Chidiere and Kosiso (2023) [6] assert that “the closure of schools for over six months at the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, and the inability of schools to engage learners in educational activities while at home also revealed the poor state of the education system in the country, which led to the discovery of the unavailability of distance online education, web-based learning system and ICT infrastructure in Nigerian education environment”.

3. EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF THE LESS PRIVILEGED CHILDREN

It is a common knowledge that in Nigeria, the education of the less privileged children in the society was the most affected during the lockdown period as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. The children of the rich who attend private schools with minimal educational facilities, were exposed to one form of online instructions or the other from time to time. On the other hand, children from low income background and those in the rural areas who have no choice than to attend public schools with little or no educational facilities due to poor funding by the government, had their education totally halted during the pandemic. All the efforts government made to introduce e-learning had no impact on these vulnerable learners because they have never been exposed to such strange form of learning.

It is now highly essential to close the gap of inequality that exist in our educational system. This can be done by providing adequate funding for the education sector. Given that we cannot predict what awaits us in the nearest future, it is absolutely necessary that we create an equitable and inclusive learning environment for the learner that will favour continuous learning for all, their socio-economic background notwithstanding. ICT infrastructures should be made available in all our institutions of learning. Teachers should be trained on how to integrate these ICT resources in their day to day teaching and learning activities. If this is done, the quality and standard of education in the country will improve tremendously creating a platform for every learner to thrive and succeed.

4. CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF E-LEARNING

Patel (2016) [7] opines that “E-learning is a new way of teaching or net based education system. The concept is very old before the emergence of Internet; Computer Aided Instruction (CAI) and Computer Based Training (CBT) is used for the same purpose”. According to Bilal (2015) [8] “E-learning is learning utilizing electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom”. In most cases, it refers to a course, programme or degree delivered completely online. It is carried out via Internet. Students can obtain their learning material online anytime and anywhere.

Gorbunova and Mokeyeva (2017) as cited in Abang (2022) [9] defines e-learning as “the provision of electronic educational contents through the media, using the computer and its networks in such a way that allows active interaction with contents and features among peers simultaneously”. E-learning is a type of learning system based on formalized teaching but with the help of electronic resources. While teaching can be based in or out of the classroom, the use of computers and the Internet forms the major component of e-learning.

According to Eteng and Ntui (2013) as cited in Abang (2022), “E-learning supports a shift from the traditional approach of teacher-directed method to new methods that supports the application of computers, thereby improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of teaching, learning, research and educational management”. The Economic Times (2023) [10] asserts that “The school which use e-learning technologies are step ahead of those which still have the traditional approach towards learning”. Obododike and Okekeokosisi (2020) [11] opine that “the benefits of e-learning include better content delivery, interactivity, quality content delivery and confidence of both learners and teachers in the educational sector”.

Holmes and Gardner (2006) as cited in Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) [12] summarized the advantages of e-learning “by noting the ability of e-learning to assess the students and their learning as they learn, and at the same time enhance their educational experiences interactivity through collaborative learning, cultural diversity, globalization, and eradicating boundaries of place and time. The most vital characteristic, as well as the advantage of e-learning in education, is that it centers on students or learners”.

5. CHALLENGES OF ADOPTING E-LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

In Nigeria, unlike western nations, the closure of schools as directed by the Federal Ministry of Education came without any clear-cut policy measures to ensure continuity in learning outside the classroom. E-learning was thus introduced with little or no preparation. Both teachers and learners were not ready to embrace the new technologies having not been exposed to them before the sudden closure of schools. According to Adetona, Ogunyemi and Oduntan (2021), “With the various level of adoption of pre-Covid-19 e-learning in Nigerian educational institutions, the coronavirus pandemic made the adoption to be much imperative. Thus, the management of many schools, colleges, and higher educational institutions made it compulsory for their teachers and instructors to give online learning during the pandemic. This to a degree, caused a paradigm shift in the way curriculum has been delivered to learners in many schools and institutions. Further, many students were forced to embrace online learning during the period.”

Some of the factors that hindered smooth e-learning teaching in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic have been identified as follows:

- **Poverty:** The Corona virus pandemic has brought to light the very large socio-economic inequalities in the Nigerian educational system. Children of wealthy families in Nigeria attend

private schools where they are exposed to educational technology resources making it easy for them to cope with online learning while children from poor background attend public schools with poor facilities. Most of these children of the poor have never come across or handle ICT learning resources. While the children of the rich might experience little disruption in their learning, because of their exposure to ICT infrastructures, children from disadvantaged homes, who have no access to computers and other ICT devices in school and outside school, would hardly cope. According to Aduwa-Ogiegbian and Iyamu (2008) [13] "In many cases, these children live in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and epileptic power supply. Inevitably, this digital divide will exacerbate learning disparities among these children".

- **Lack of adequate funding:** The use of ICT devices in any endeavor requires huge capital investment. Education in general and language education in particular are not exempted from this. According to Obododike and Okekeokosisi (2020), "Poor budgetary allocation has been the major challenge for the adoption of e-learning in Nigerian institutions of learning". It has however been established that language education is under-funded despite the fact that it is made a compulsory subject in Nigerian schools. Akan and Otu (2013)[14] observed that "lack of funds is the major reason for the underdevelopment of language education in Nigeria. Since early nineties, the Nigerian government started losing interest in the teaching and learning of French language". In the same vein, indigenous language teaching and learning has not been given the attention it deserves which has resulted to lack of development of appropriate orthography to facilitate teaching and learning. This situation has been compounded with the corona virus pandemic. Presently, heads of institutions of learning employ French teachers to teach subjects other than French, especially in public schools. They see French language education as not necessary. Although teaching and learning of indigenous languages is compulsory at all levels of the primary and secondary, hardly will you see any school offering them as a subject due to lack of materials and manpower. Insufficient funding tends to hinder the effectiveness of the process of teaching and learning due to lack of current and relevant materials, and ICT devices needed for its smooth delivery.
- **Poor technological infrastructure:** The benefits of ICT based language education cannot be overemphasized. Language experts acknowledge these benefits of ICT and are positively disposed to integrate ICT resources to the traditional methods of language teaching. They have proposed several ICT projects over the years, but poor technological infrastructure seems to be the major challenge to the accomplishment of such projects. Relevant authorities in the country have not given it the required attention. Good policies are many times made in this regard without implementation. Technological infrastructure in Nigeria has suffered poor management, poor Internet connectivity, lack of consistent power supply, poor manpower engagement, theft and lack of maintenance. Due to meager budget, hardware and software needed for language studies and other educational activities are not accessible.
- **Lack of skilled manpower:** The old methods of teaching and learning of languages known as traditional methods all over the world have experienced significant change as a result of the introduction of the use of ICT resources. Teaching and learning is now carried out beyond the confinement of the classroom. It is now moving towards the virtual environment. There is therefore an urgent need for teachers/learners of language in Nigeria to improve on their ICT skills. Without proper training, no quantity or quality of ICT infrastructure made available in our schools will be useful. Teachers and learners must take up the challenge of acquiring the required new skills that will enable the adoption of the new technologies.

6. INTEGRATION OF ICT RESOURCES IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF LANGUAGES

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an effective tool for quality delivery in almost all fields of life, education inclusive with teaching and learning as the core of the educational process. "The need of technological innovation has brought the communication revolution and rapid development of technological application in teaching and learning" (Prinzessinnadia, 2013) [15]. If the use of ICT resources are to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the educational system, then its application in support of teaching and learning should be given adequate attention by all the stakeholders to the educational enterprise. Prinzessinnadia (2013) opines that "Some experts and practitioners of language education have strongly supported the utilization of ICT in language learning to improve efficiency and effectiveness that can improve the quality of understanding and mastery of the language studied".

According to Hartoyo (2008) as cited in Prinzessinnadia (2013), "the teaching profession has been shaped by a desire to find a better way of teaching than the existing method". The development of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has tremendously improved the quality of language teaching and learning due to its flexibility. It is rich and interactive in nature. "It can encourage in language learning more than other media due to the computer's ability to present material in more diverse ways than either book or video does. In addition CALL is able to generate interaction and improve communicative competence, including providing authentic material to class or for self-learning. This method focuses on computer utilization to enhance language learning" (Prinzessinnadia, 2013). Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) "software is very diverse. It includes drill, tutorials, games, simulations and information databases" (Gündüz, 2005) [16]. CALL allows each learner to move at his own pace and to study in his own time. Scott (2023) [17] notes that "computer lessons or games normally adapt to the individual based on their own progress, not on a set standard, so each student is able to have a more personalized experience. Also differences in learning styles, language skills desired, pacing and learning schedules can easily be accommodated".

Hypermedia can also be used in classroom by learners. It allows them to have maximum control over their studies because they can learn at their own pace and handle some activities on their own. Learners are encouraged to embrace a new and pleasant way of language learning. This new experience goes beyond just reading from books and interacting with the teacher. Eastment (1999) [18] explained that "students can listen to recordings, watch videos, speak into the microphone, record their own progress or learn words by clicking on pictures and hearing the pronunciation. The Worldwide web is however a better alternative to CD ROMS". Eastment emphasized that "students can practice their skills there and that is more useful for the teacher than the CD ROMS because teachers can intervene with their own ideas or materials. Both the teacher and language learner are therefore equipped with a variety of tool to teach and learn any given language at any time".

The student can also take advantage of different Internet websites to practice their knowledge of a given language. The Internet offers a range of communication technologies for students to communicate with peers both at home and abroad, such as text messaging, text chat etc. These activities encourage collaboration and development of spontaneous communication skills. There are websites created for the teaching and learning of language. These websites offer multiple choices for teaching and learning particularly independent learning. They also offer a wide range of teaching and learning materials. Generally students could access, read and interpret suitable information, selecting their own topic and then print relevant pages.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has redefined and introduced a new trend in teaching and learning across the countries of the world, especially in the developing countries. The traditional classroom

methods of teaching was rendered near obsolete. Nigerian educational system was among the most affected due to inadequate technological infrastructures to help embrace e-learning despite its numerous potentials. Most academic studies including language studies, were trapped in the web. To arrest this ugly situation and prevent a repeat in the future, government has to be more proactive. Investing in educational services should be made a priority. Government should come up with policies that would bring public schools at the same level with private schools thereby bridging the inequality that exist in our educational system. Every school child should be exposed to e-learning facilities by equipping all schools with adequate technological infrastructures. This will greatly enhance the quality of teaching and learning delivery. Teachers and learners should make conscious effort to key into the new trends. Teachers should be trained on how to integrate digital learning platforms, video lessons and other open online materials into their daily teachings. To ensure that this innovation is adopted successfully, government should as a matter of urgency put in place structures that mitigate some of the identified factors hindering the full adoption of e-learning in the country's educational system such as poor power supply and poor or lack of internet connectivity among others especially in the rural areas.

References

1. Adedigba A. Covid 19: FG lunches free e-learning portal for students. 2020. Accessed 23 November 2023. Available: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/coronavirus/389775-covid-19-fg-lunches-free-e-learning-portals-for-students-html>
2. Adetona Z., Ogunyemi J. and Oduntan E. Investigating e-learning utilization during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Southwest Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*. 2021; 12(5): 893-900.
3. Iffih B. N. Theoretical issues in Nigeria development. *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*. 1989; 5(56): 78-89.
4. Wikipedia. Language education. Accessed 24 November 2023. Available: [en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>language education](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/language_education)
5. Federal Republic of Nigeria. National policy on education, 4th edition, Government Press, Abuja, 2004.
6. Okagbue E. F., Ezeachikulo U., P., Nchekwubenchukwu I. S., Chidiere I. E., Kosiso O., Ouattaraa C. A. T. and Nwigwe E. O. The effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the education system in Nigeria: The role of competence-based education. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*. Vol. 4, February 2023. 100219. Accessed 12 December 2023. Available: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666374022000954
7. Patel C. S. E-learning: Features and its types. *International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences*. 2016; 4:1. Accessed 24 November, 2023. Available: [IJRHS_2016_vol04_issue_01_02\(1\).pdf](#)
8. Bilal S. E-learning Revolutionize education: An Exploratory Study. 2015. Accessed 24 November 2023. Available: <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/280862765>
9. Abang F. Utilization of e-learning technologies for business education programmes in higher institutions of Northwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Studies, Trends and Practice*. 2022; 24(8): 115-132.
10. The Economic Times. What is e-learning? 2023. Accessed 24 November 2023. Available: <https://m.economictimes.com/definition/e-learning>

11. Obododike M. P. and Okekeokosisi J. B. O. Challenges of implementing E-learning in Nigeria educational system in the Covid-19 pandemic era. *Social Sciences and Education Review*. 2020; 7(2): 152-171.
12. Arkorful V. and Abaidoo N. The role of e-learning, advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in higher education. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Assistance learning* 2015; 12(1): 29-42.
13. Aduwa-Ogiegbean S. E. and Iyamu E. O. Using Information and Communication Technology in Secondary school in Nigeria. *Educational Technology and Society*.2008; 8 (1).
14. Akan P. A.and Otu J. O. Challenge in integrating ICT in foreign language education: the Nigerian case. *Journal of Language*. 2013; 13(1).
15. Prinzessinnadia's Blog. ICT in English language teaching and learning. 2013. Accessed 27 December 2023. Available: prinzessinnadia.wordpress.com
16. Gündüz N. Computer Assisted Language Learning. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 2005; 1(2): 193-214.
17. Scott J. What is Computer-assisted language learning and how does it work? *FluentU*. July 14 2023. Accessed 27 December 2023. Available: www.fluentu.com/blog/education/what-is-computer-assisted-learning-2/
18. Eastment D. *The Internet and ELT*. The British Council, 1999.