

COMBATING COVID – 19 PANDEMIC EFFECT: INVESTING IN DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EKITI STATE

Abstract

It is required from the twenty first century educators and learners to have the ability to use digital technologies and communication skills in order to develop appropriate attitudes towards teaching and learning. It has been established that technology does not solve all the educational problems, but if it is used correctly, it will help teaching and learning to achieve great objective in the post COVID - 19 era. Information and communication technology has promoted the teaching and learning of English during COVID - 19. In this 21st century, the range of technologies available for use in language learning and teaching has become very imperative and the ways that they are being used in classrooms all over the world, is relevant to language practice. This study examined the use of information and communication technological resources and the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools. The study used a descriptive research method and the population for the study was 100 English language teachers from different secondary schools in Ekiti State. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages. It was therefore recommended that Nigerian government should provide adequate resources to schools, and the teachers should be trained and retrained with a view to updating their ICT skills.

Keywords: technology, covid – 19 pandemic, digital literacy, English language, education

Introduction

Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies with a view to finding, evaluating, creating, and communicating information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. Neher (2020, p. 1) defines digital literacy as “being able to have conversations, conduct work and communicate in digital channels. It is about having an understanding of how relevant digital tools and technologies work and being able to use them.” The incorporation of technology into teaching pedagogy indicates that teachers and students will also develop digital literacy skills at the same time. This is also the view of Egbe (2019, p. 34) as he opines that digital literacy “is one of the forms of new literacies which involves the ABILITY to USE digital technologies and communication skills”. Bali (2016, p. 25) in Egbe (2019) explains that digital literacy is not just “the ability about the skills of using technologies, but about how we use our judgment to maintain awareness of what we are reading, and writing, why we are doing it, and whom we are addressing.” (p. 34). Technology has become very important as professional teachers because it is vital to the social aspect of life. Educators must have digital literacy skills to adequately equip students to become productive and be better citizens of society. Stanley (2013) asserts that:

An overwhelming majority of teachers in Europe (90 per cent) use ICT to prepare their lessons (Empirica, 2006). All European Union (EU) countries have invested in ICT in schools and this has included spending on ‘equipment, connectivity, professional development and digital learning content’ (p. 45).

A source, (<https://www.teachhub.com/technology-in-the-classroom>) affirms that “Digital literacy consists of skills, knowledge and understanding that enable critical, creative, discerning and safe

practices with digital technologies.” Lacking vital literacy skills will, no doubt hold a person back at every stage of his/her life. UNESCO (<https://en.unesco.org>) submits that acquiring and improving literacy skills throughout life is an intrinsic part of the right to education. According to the organization, “the “multiplier effect” of literacy empowers people, enables them to participate fully in society and contributes to improve livelihoods”. Therefore, educators have a social and professional role to be digitally literate. This is because teaching with digital technology prepares students for future participation in an evolving society where new media practices are deeply embedded in the associated structures and processes. Ailoaiei (2021) adds that digital literacy, also known as cyber literacy, “is an umbrella term that refers to the ability to use computer technologies effectively and to understand the implications of your actions” (p. 1). To him, being able to critically use technology, navigating through various online forums, handling different types of devices, understanding how the digital world works, being able to creatively and inventively manipulate technology to solve problems, finding relevant information in the digital space, correctly identifying information in different types of media and formats, evaluating digital resources, using digital tools in a safe and ethical way, effectively creating and sharing information through digital tools and acknowledging online sources are, digital literacy.

COVID -19 and the Global Phenomenon

As a result of the global pandemic, millions of children were out of school, many more millions had no access to online learning opportunities. Many more millions are currently falling behind in teaching and learning. COVID -19, is the most current and prominent phenomenon in the media today. Medically, the strain that causes it is named *Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)*. It has implications for all areas of national and global affairs which include governance, politics, society living, health, economics, education, agriculture, security

and most especially, education, among many others. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (2020) has this to say on COVID – 19 and digital literacy:

The pandemic is compelling governments and societies to turn toward digital technologies to respond to the crisis and, increasingly, is requiring governments to adopt an open government approach and to use digital communication channels to provide reliable information on global and national COVID-19 developments.

United Nations recommends distance learning as a result of COVID – 19. Online learning, through the use of digital resources, will enhance teaching and learning in order to assuage and mollify against the prevailing problem being faced presently owing to COVID - 19 pandemic.

United Nations asserts that:

Policymakers should seize the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to establish tailor-made digital government tools, strategies and collaborations for the future,” the brief states. “The crisis has demonstrated that it is impossible for societies to ignore technological advancements as they are continuing to change business models and people’s everyday lives. Governments should embrace these policy- and technological developments and harvest the digital opportunities that can support the long-term sustainable development of their countries (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/policy>).

Technology-Using Teachers

Technology has now been accepted globally as a crucial educational tool in the teaching of English language. This is because it brings about a lot of potential opportunities to enhance both the content and delivery of the pedagogies related to traditional English language learning and teaching: “This is primarily achieved by enabling the student and/or teacher to revisit problematic content time after time until it is fully understood and assimilated” (Alqahtani, 2019, p. 169). Ofodu and Oso (2015, p. 32) maintain that:

ICT is best used in teaching English language as it offers special visual demonstrations and illustrations. For instance, students can be taken to language laboratory for speech demonstration and listening drills. Word processing and communication software are said to have been used to develop pupil language and communication skill. In studies that rely largely on self-reporting, most users feel that using ICTs make them more effective learners.

This means that the use of technologies can provide a meaningfully constructive teaching and learning milieu for teachers and learners to develop knowledge in significance methods. This is corroborated by Isife (2020) while lamenting the dearth in the use of ICT at the public institutions during the COVID - 19 pandemic in Ekiti State. She states the importance of ICT thus: “Information Communication Technology in public institution is designed to advance information literacy and the ability to access, use, evaluate information from different sources so as to promote development, solve problems as well as to generate new knowledge” (p. 74). No wonder, Healey et al. (2011: 9) in Stanley (2013) maintain that “teaching our students language in its traditional media is no longer enough” and “increasingly, in everyday and professional life, people need the skills of electronic literacy”.

According to Bordbar (2010) in Alqahtani (2019, p. 170) who investigated the reasons why language teachers use computer technology in the classroom. His study examined teachers' attitudes towards computer and information technology as well as the various ways they applied practical computer-assisted language learning knowledge to their own language instruction delivery. He found out that almost all the teachers held positive attitudes towards the use of computers in the class. This implies that the use of technology is a crucial tool in the teaching and learning of English language and Oyinloye (2010) in Ofodu and Oso (2015) state that the use of ICT "can be of immense assistance when the series of method is used in language teaching" (p. 32). Motteram (2013) elaborates the importance of technology in teaching and learning thus:

As digital technologies have taken a hold in society in general, this particular question is not asked quite so often, but it is still important to make sure that the technologies that we have available are used effectively. People are always tempted to try to make an argument for technology having an impact on the development of pedagogy and in many cases we can see that the use of technology has enabled teachers to re-think what they are doing (p. 7).

This means that using technology is a key to changing teachers' attitudes toward better teaching as well as increasing teachers' confidence in using computers and to building their technology competency. Samuel and Zitun (2007: 10) in Stanley (2013, P. 46) in their research indicates that:

Training in ICT skills is crucial in implementing ICT integration in the teaching and learning of English' and 'the extent to which teachers are given time and access to pertinent training to use

computers to support learning plays a major role in determining whether or not technology has a major impact on achievement.

This means that if the teachers are empowered with the right technological skills, and there are adequate infrastructures in schools across the country, the teachers and even students will develop greatly.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the level of English language teachers in secondary schools' use of ICT. The objectives of the study are to:

- i. describe the use of technological resources as an effective method to learn English language in Ekiti State;
- ii. explain the principles of the teaching English process via the application of the technological tools in classrooms;
- iii. identify the different technological resources that exist today in the teaching English language in Ekiti State;
- iv. demonstrate the different methods that the teacher can apply in a classroom using digital tools for teaching English in the classrooms; and to
- v. describe the interaction that teaching English, using technological resources, can create between teachers and students in the school.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of English language using technological resources in classrooms owing to COVID – 19 global pandemic is imperative for this study. 21st century education is taught through one of the greatest inventions of mankind, the technology. Stanley (2013) in (Jones-Kavalier and

Flannigan 2006: 1) describes literacy to include “the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments” (p. 58). In view of this, English and technology are two key words for the future success of learners, educators and schools as well. Peacock (2013) states that “times have changed, teachers have evolved, and we now have a new breed of learning technologists” (p. 2). Furthermore, he emphasizes that:

Teachers who spent their lives managing with a textbook, a tape recorder and a blackboard are now adept at using PowerPoint to present grammar, playing podcasts to practise listening skills, pulling texts off the world wide web to introduce reading skills and perhaps most ground-breaking of all – empowering students by giving them access to a wide range of web-based tools that allow them to publish work and engage with live audiences in real contexts (p. 2).

In view of the above, this study examined the connection between the English language and technology with the aim of demonstrating that the English language may well be taught using different technological resources that are available in the world today. Therefore, technology is not only used in the media, entertainment or jobs but also for language teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses descriptive method and questionnaires for the collection of data since it is an effective resource in determining the opinion and attitudes of a large population. The population for the study consists of all the secondary school English teachers in Ekiti State. Random

sampling technique was used to select samples in all the local government areas of Ekiti State. A sample of one hundred teachers was used for the study.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The questionnaire is the only instrument used to collect data for this study. This is because the study aimed to collect information from the secondary school teachers on teaching English using technology resources. The respondents were drawn from all the local governments in Ekiti State. The questionnaire was administered to 100 respondents. They were professional English language teachers.

The instrument for the study was a twenty one questionnaire with sections A and B. Section A was intended to elicit information on the current teaching assignments of the teachers, school and class currently teaching as well as whether the teacher knows what technology involves. Section B of the questionnaire was meant to gather information on the number of students in the class of the respondents, the number of those who needed help in the use of English, number of years the teacher has been teaching, etc.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question “A” asked teachers ten questions on the use of technology:

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	%	NO	%
1	Do you use technology for teaching and communication?	20	20	80	80
2	Do you teach English using your cellphone, mp3 or YouTube?	10	10	90	90
3	Have you been teaching some English phrases using	20	20	80	80

	technology (cell phones, laptops, tablets, mp3, etc.)?				
4	Is Internet a good tool for teaching a language?	100	100	0	0
5	Would you like to recommend to your students to watch movies with subtitles in the classroom to improve their English pronunciation?	70	70	20	20
6	Is English teaching more effective if online resources are used?	85	85	15	15
7	Would you like your students to use technology to learn languages in the classroom?	100	100	0	0
8	Do you think that using computers to solve oral and written exercises is funnier than just listening to you in the classroom?	80	80	17	17
9	Do you think that schools should change their method of teaching languages using digital resources?	85	85	10	10
10	Is English a language that everyone should learn online?	40	40	50	50

Promotion of digital literacy in the classroom is imperative at this time in Nigeria, and particularly in Ekiti State. According to a blogger, “digital literacy isn’t limited to computer literacy or technical know-how—digital literacy also addresses online information, social interactions, and the evolving ways that students engage with the world” (<https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/digital-literacy-in-the-classroom>). From the responses of the 100 respondents, it is obvious that many English language teachers do not use technology for teaching and communication; only 20 percent of the English language teachers in Ekiti State use

technology for teaching while 80 percent do not use technology in teaching. According to an online resource, <https://www.teachhub.com/technology-in-the-classroom>: “Educators must know how to successfully integrate technology with pedagogy to not only engage students, but to ensure students can effectively use digital tools to support the workplace and businesses for centuries to come” (p.3).

On the use of cellphone, mp3 or YouTube to teach English, 90 percent were novice to the use of these technologies while only 10 percent make use of the resources. Alqahtani (2019) asserts that:

It is essential that the education sector keep pace of the global technological revolution by adopting modern technological means such as computerization, multi-media devices, mobile phones, audio/visual effects applications, and social media, to optimize English language instruction and equip teachers to connect with classroom language learners in a systematic and advanced way (p.169).

He adds that many of these resources are specifically designed to promote effective English teaching and at the same time increasing learner’s understanding and attainment of English language skills. On whether Internet is a good tool for teaching a language, all the respondents had positive response: 100 percent. Motteram (2013, p. 7) affirm the importance of this device in the teaching of English language thus: “technology having an impact on the development of pedagogy and in many cases we can see that the use of technology has enabled teachers to re-think what they are doing”. On the question of if the teachers could recommend to their students to watch movies with subtitles in the classroom to improve their English pronunciation, 70

percent of the respondents responded positively while 20 percent said that they would not recommend to their students to watch movies with subtitles in the classroom to improve their English pronunciation. Nevertheless, 10 percent were neutral. It has been discovered that in the past, students were given notebook laptops by the State Government but many of them, rather than using them for educational purpose, they rather used them to watch blue films, pornographic and nude pictures and other obnoxious activities. That is why some teachers were skeptical on recommending to their students to watch movies with subtitles in the classroom to improve their English pronunciation.

On whether English teaching would be more effective if online resources are used, 85% agreed on this while 15% disagreed. Most educational institutions around the globe, especially, since the discovery of coronavirus have now absorbed technology into current and future curricula, technological and media-based pedagogies have assumed considerable prominence due to proven enhanced learning outcomes, especially in comparison with traditional teaching methods. In view of this, Alqahtani (2019) recommended the use of modern technology for teachers but states the problems of obsolete teaching practices which, include:

Traditional methods lead students through precise curriculum content and rely on outdated learning aids such as blackboards and textbooks.

As such, the teacher merely relays the information without accounting for positive or negative results. Traditional methods rely on simple strategies that do not meet the purpose of learning or basic needs in the process of teaching. Since such teacher-centred pedagogies situate the learner as a recipient, their overarching goal is the extent to which a student can replicate information without necessarily understanding

it. Students rely on received sounds and images as opposed to interaction and discussion with the teacher. Student accreditation by means of set texts tend to foster boredom and loss of motivation and attention in attainment, as opposed to modern technological teaching methods which inhere numerous incentives that increase the likelihood of acquiring English language skills in a timely and positive way (p. 170).

It is quite understandable from the above that ICT offers engaging and fast-evolving learning environments, blurs the boundaries between formal and informal education and prompts teachers to develop new ways of teaching and enabling students to learn. Motteram (2013, p. 10) adds that technology has “an impact on the development of pedagogy and in many cases we can see that the use of technology has enabled teachers to re-think what they are doing”. Another question is whether the teachers like their students to use technology to learn languages in the classroom and the response was 100% “yes”. This means that the advantages of using technology to teach English language are enormous; this will make it possible to cover areas of the curriculum that there is no enough time for in the today’s busy world of formal education, particularly in our secondary schools.

The next question for English teachers is: Do you think that using computers to solve oral and written exercises is funnier than just listening to you in the classroom? 80% answer yes, while 17% answer no and 3% had no response to the question. Many teachers are still far away from the use of technological resources in Ekiti State. A lot of teachers are not aware that, through digital technologies one can provide better access to English language for their learners. Another question, whether the teachers think that schools should change their method of teaching

languages using digital resources; 85% agreed while 10% disagreed and 5% were neutral. This means that effective language learning and teaching using technology in order to formulate a range of solutions is crucial for English teachers at this time. This study has revealed that teachers are ready to use modern technology rather than traditional teaching methods due to the problems caused by coronavirus in the educational system. Finally, on whether everyone can learn English language online, 40% responded “yes” and 50% “no” while 10% indicated neutral. Alqahtani (2019, p. 74) in his study explains that “educational studies have attributed poor levels of student achievement to an inadequate use of technology in education which is compounded by the continued prevalence of traditional teaching methods”. Owing to this phenomenon, technology should be used for all sorts of specific language learning activities, such as oral practice, reading as well as writing skills development.

Nevertheless, however, in the second part, “B” of the questionnaire, the respondents reasoned differently. For example: Please describe your professional development experiences related to technology and their usefulness regarding your teaching and lesson planning. For example, what technology related workshops/courses/training/conferences have you attended and how useful are they for your teaching and lesson planning? Majority of the respondents had no training or conference experience. Yu-Feng (2005, p. 3) states that “being able to integrate computer technology legitimately requires teachers to know how and when to use it and when not to use it, and how to integrate it appropriately. Are teachers ready? Current research shows that teachers are struggling.” This is exactly the case of English teachers in Ekiti State of Nigeria.

Next question: What technology-related topics/issues/concerns have you discussed with colleagues, school administrators, and/or friends, and how do these discussions contribute to your teaching and lesson planning? All respondents failed to answer this question but a few of

them manage to answer the question tersely. The reason behind this is that many teachers are not well-prepared to integrate computer technology into their teaching. Many English teachers welcome the idea of using the Internet are comfortable with using the Internet but from the findings, the Internet is not well integrated in their classroom. Ofodu and Oso (2015) equally discovers in her research that “many of the ICT resources were not available in schools and the few available ones were not easily accessible” (p. 34).

Another question is: Please describe what technology means to you in your teaching and your opinions about the roles technology can play in your lessons. For example, how important do you feel it is to use technology in language teaching and why?

Only a handful of teachers describe what technology means in their teaching areas as many of them did not answer the question. They reported that they had limited knowledge about technology and they have not been integrating technology to teach English lessons. However, a teacher said that she had used computers in her teaching in various ways. For example she had used WhatsApp application and she had her students replied her, given her feedback during the 2020 Covid – 19 lockdown. English teachers in Ekiti State prefer to use traditional teaching methods instead of modern technology because of their level of knowledge in term of digital literacy.

Question: How do you feel technology can be used in your classroom? All the teachers affirmed the importance of using technology in the classroom but complaint of lack of these technological resources and the epileptic power supply in the country. Besides, many schools have no electricity at all while many teachers criticized the high cost of living in the state and the government had not done anything to boost the welfare of teachers. The majority of the respondents do not have digital experience in teaching and learning and this is corroborated by a

research: “For teachers, the main impediment was the lack of appropriate training to design and manage distance learning programmes. This was compounded by a lack of infrastructure: electricity, connectivity, devices; and a lack of appropriate learning materials: books, television and internet-enabled devices” (eLearning, 2020, p.4). Nevertheless, studies have shown that teaching English with technological tools would enable students to be more pro-active and to learn in line with their particular interests and abilities. Therefore, utilization of technology devices and access to software technologies will improve teaching and learning in our secondary schools.

Question: Please describe any lessons incorporating technology you have carried out in your classroom or have experienced or heard about in other classrooms: Teachers need to use ICT because it will enhance a positive learning and teaching environment. From our findings, there are resources that could be adapted by English language teachers for teaching context and for meeting the learners’ needs but these resources are not being utilized by Ekiti State English language teachers, owing to several factors: insufficient ICT tools for teachers and teachers’ lack of digital training, lack of facilities and negative attitude, lack of access to knowledge learnt through the internet, etc. Many English teachers failed to respond to this question because they have not been incorporating technology to teach English language or Literature in English in the classroom.

Discussion

The rapid advances in technology in the educational sector today have drastically changed the traditional method of teaching and learning. The integration of ICT in teaching and learning has been encapsulated in computer-assisted instruction (CAI). However, it is observed that the use of laptop and projector to display photos of several educational activities that might be of interest

to the students in order to stimulate discussion were not adapted to their environment. English teachers in Ekiti State have not been using projector to show videos of topics in Literature in English and other topics in English language.

The finding revealed that English teachers were expected to upgrade their knowledge and acquire digital skills in order to integrate ICT for effective teaching and learning but have not been trained in this area. It was observed that teachers lacked support from the government of Nigeria, particularly, the State Government in making use of new technologies to enhance their teaching work before integrating ICT resources in the classroom. According to Raja and Nagasubramani (2018):

Technological developments like digital cameras, projectors, mind training software, computers, Power point presentations, 3D visualization tools; all these have become great sources for teachers to help students grasp a concept easily (p. 34).

It was observed that many teachers in Ekiti State had no access to personal computer as this is also one of the major factors affecting digital teaching in Ekiti State. It has been argued that there would be a positive impact on students when ICT is used appropriately in school but lack of training of teachers is a serious obstacle to the implementation ICT in the teaching of English language in Ekiti State.

The findings indicated that majority of the schools have no ICT laboratory and the schools need to develop their skills and improve their knowledge of technology because digital skills are needed in teaching and learning. The results found that almost all the teachers held neutral opinion but positive attitudes towards the use of computers in the class. The findings discovered

the importance of technology and the teachers' views on digital skill, and competence, and the urgent need to introduce ICT into schools. Also, the importance of language laboratory and the attitudes of English language teachers towards computer technology should be reinforced. This is because many teachers still adapt to the use of traditional teaching methods instead of modern technology such as projector, video, making audio recordings, taking pictures, Whatsapp application, emailing, voice note, online games, internet, e-books, Google search, laptop, mobile phone or tablet, You Tube, interactive whiteboards, Word Processing, Internet, digital cameras, television, CD/DVD Players, radio and tape recorders, etc. That is why Olokoba, Abdullahi, and Omosidi, (2014) in their research affirm that:

In this age of digitization, being able to effectively apply technology should be high on the list of what teachers at all levels of our education should know and be able to do in any instructional transaction. There is substantial evidence that, if used appropriately for specific purposes in specific contexts, technology can be an effective tool in supporting teaching and learning (p. 60).

There is no doubt about it; the importance of technology in schools cannot be underestimated. To say the truth, with the introduction of technology in the school system, it would be easier for teachers to impart knowledge and for students to acquire new skills remotely without stress. With the introduction of digital literacy in the educational system, the process of teaching and learning will definitely be more pleasant and enjoyable.

Recommendations

ICTs are used by a few English language teachers in Ekiti State and this is a critical part of teaching and learning in developed countries as they are considered integral in order to build social and economic participation in those countries. The researchers recommend that:

In order to maximise the benefits of digital technology in teaching and learning, the Ekiti State Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should as a matter of urgency, train and re-train, not only the English language teachers, but all secondary school teachers to acquire or increase not only their teaching competencies, but also their ICT competencies, in order to enable them to facilitate learning in this digital age. According to Mathevula (2015):

Teachers should be able to create effective digital presentations using common tools for preparing slide shows, videos and podcasts. With these skills, the teacher can create presentations that follow the principles of communication, and can apply these design principles to the evaluation of students' digital work. Once created, the teacher should be able to deliver digital multimedia presentations to students. Using common devices such as computers, projectors and screens, the teacher can set up classroom presentations and arrange for students to do the same (p.36).

In view of this, ICT can enhance a teacher and student's interaction; the Internet can give teachers opportunities to obtain learning resources to improve his/her course content; digital technology can to increase students learning motivations and it can enhance teachers and students' language and writing skills as well.

It is very imperative for the government to establish Internet networks in each of the public secondary schools in Ekiti State in order to equip teachers and even students to properly avail of modern digital tools. Most of the secondary school teachers in Ekiti State have limited technology experience, and they cannot use a technology they have not mastered. Many teachers will incorporate technology into their teaching if digital tools with constant power supply are provided in the public schools.

Conclusion

The results revealed that English language teachers were not computer-literate and they were not trained for the full integration of ICT into teaching and learning in the public secondary schools in Ekiti State. The analysis revealed that teachers' perception, with regards to the use of ICT were neutral but they had positive attitude as regards the benefits of using technology to teach English language in the classroom. The researchers suggested the urgent need to train and re-train, not only the English language teachers, but all public secondary school teachers in Ekiti State to acquire or increase not only their teaching competencies, but also their ICT skills.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist. The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

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