

# INTERNET AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

*The adoption and application of the Internet as one of the most reliable and effective tools for teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools and in particular, in tertiary institutions has brought creative and far-reaching changes to language education programmes. The Internet, since its evolution, has transformed the process in which ideas, knowledge and information are recorded, transferred and communicated in education. This paper therefore addresses the concepts of Internet, its relevance to teaching and learning of English language and advocates for its usage in language teaching. The paper further highlights the prospects of the Internet in the teaching and learning of English language as well as the perceived challenges of such application. Finally, the paper identifies information and communication technology phobias as one of the challenges of the English language teachers with the evolution of Internet and ends with a call on the government, administrators and other stakeholders to provide more sophisticated Internet equipment in Nigerian schools as this will keep evolving to improve the quality of teaching learning process.*

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## Introduction

The internet is the largest computer network in the world as it consists of millions of connected networks around the world (British Council, 2013). Millions of computers are connected to each other through the telephone systems like spider's web thus achieving instant global communication. Through the internet, large amount of educational information can be accessed as it continues to play a major role in teaching and learning e-mail, instant messaging, and video conferencing bringing pupils and schools into contact easily for joint project work. According to the Federal Networking Council (FNC, 1995), internet refers to the global information system that

is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-on. It is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions/follow-on, and/or other IP compatible protocols provides, uses or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein. It can be extensively used for language teaching and learning and can be useful for teaching the four language skills in English language. This can be by e-mail, the worldwide web (www), text, audio and video conferencing.

Due to the internet application to the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria, Nigerians now excel in the field of information technology. Digital gadgets like mobile phones and personal computers (PCs) have become an integral part of the lives of Nigerians, in contrast to the time when PCs with internet connectivity were first launched solely for commercial use in 1995 (British Council, 2013). It is interesting to find the internet playing a major role in language teaching, the impact of which is especially noticeable to those who work in the corporate world. This paper therefore discusses the various aspects of internet use, particularly in the education sector in Nigeria.

The need for the integration of Internet in the curricula in Nigeria is imperative given the fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by tremendous global scientific and technological advancement and these global changes usually referred to as globalization is propelled by the internet. Today, teaching and learning is powered by technology and the English language is the language of technologies; consequently, technologies must be integrated in English language teaching and learning in order to produce proficient users of English and technologies.

The Nigerian education system is becoming more interesting with recent reforms towards integration of internet with language learning in the school curricula at all levels of education. For example, in some privately owned institutions and a few well-equipped model schools, learners and their teachers access resources from the net and use animation and graphics for completing their project work. It is common even among

students in both secondary and tertiary institutions to possess an e-mail address through which they communicate with their friends. In the case of college and university students, “surfing the net” for doing academic work is often considered a necessity as the resources provided by the internet serve as an additional input to them. The linguistic approach encourages students to take responsibility for their learning style and process, offering greater scope for learner's autonomy. Such collaborative project work that they do by using web resources in turn enhances their performance in the classroom (ADAPTI, 2014).

### **English Language Teaching and the Internet**

With the integration of internet into education sector in Nigeria, the role of the internet in Nigerian education system has been constantly evolving and language teaching in Nigerian schools as well has seen many linguistic changes (Emenajo, 2004). Gone are the days when teachers served as the sole resource providers, totally dependent on the printed material. The impact of globalization on the Nigerian economy is so important that educators have now realized that the internet can supplement a teacher as it provides greater opportunities for language input thus promoting language learning (Kalyaniwalla, 2008). With the era of portals in language teaching, English is now being imparted with the help of the Internet at the primary through secondary schools, and it is in most Nigerian homes and schools for communication purposes.

At the college level, language teachers do encourage students to do online communication exercises, assignments and listen to audio files found on the net relating to their topics (apart from the more obvious uses of internet resources from sites developed specifically for ESL/EFL). Some teachers who have had orientation in using internet tools give web based projects or assignments on different topics which necessitate students holding online discussions with their peers through study group created by their teachers. Students who actively participate in such discussions equip themselves with updated information by accessing articles relating to their topic of discussion from various websites. No doubt, these practices have enhanced their communication skills and promoted the positive quality of sharing ideas with others.

#### **Relevance of Internet to the Teaching Learning Process in Nigerian Schools**

The relevance of internet to the teaching learning process in Nigerian schools cannot be over-emphasized. This is credited to the findings of most recent research works that have shown that the involvement of modern technology in the teaching-learning process helps to make learning faster and easier. The use of internet encourages active learning, allows for innovative teaching and self-pacing learning (Afolabi, 2006). In the same vein, Yusuf (2007) asserts that internet makes learning to be accelerated, enriched and deepened. Internet can assist in making the work load of teachers less strenuous simply because a lot of records kept by the teachers manually can be kept now in the class system. Such records include attendance register, class profile, time-table, progress

reports of learners, continuous assessment reports, raw scores and results. It enables the teacher to prepare student-centred lessons rather than teacher-centred lesson. It helps to develop teacher's knowledge through the use of internet. A lot of on-line resources are assessed to collect relevant information for preparing lesson for the study.

#### **Application of Internet to Teaching and Learning of English Language**

In Nigerian educational system, specifically in higher education, if one of our goals in language teaching is to prepare our students to be qualified world citizens, the ability to use English and the Internet is one essential quality. This is because our graduates can collaborate and share their ideas, knowledge, feelings and beliefs with peers from any corner of the world. This issue of higher education quality was discussed in the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO, in Wang and Kim (2000) as:

*Quality also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects. p.1*

In terms of assessment and evaluation, new methods of assessing competencies of language use of learners have to be included in the syllabus. Both process and product assessment and evaluation need to be considered. To reinforce interactive networking, electronic portfolios, teleconferencing, on-line self-tests, email writing tasks, etc. there is urgent need to use internet packages into the teaching and learning process in all schools.

There are several reasons for which language learning is imparted through the internet. One is the growing need for mastery of communication skills to secure challenging jobs in leading multi-national companies and the increasing number of students in quest for higher educational opportunities abroad. This has made many educational institutions to sign agreements with Language Testing Systems as obtainable in India and Nigeria. In Nigeria for example, many universities have signed agreements with the British Council for conducting the Business English Certification test to students of affiliated colleges. It is worthwhile in this paper to point out that many British Trained Nigerian English Teachers in tertiary institutions now serve as ELT consultants and TKT, CLIL Trainers on their language training programme (British Council, 2013).

Second, the educational system in most countries is drifting from its previous reliance on maximum retention (rote) to one of exploration and research making it an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The extent of encouragement from educational reforms and conferences for the language teachers to integrate their teaching with the online environment is indeed encouraging. Technology is now in the reach of the masses in most countries of the world today and that has helped the government and some agencies in such countries to teach the fundamentals of the language through globalization.

### **Prospects of Internet-Based Teaching and Learning of English Language**

The technology revolution in education has reached the point where the

concept of e-learning has been widely accepted, well known for its digital library solutions, offers language laboratory solutions which provide multimedia content with activities relating to all four language skills and grammar. This new development is attributed to the increasing numbers of broadband connections provided by a few technology service providers. Unlike the situation in science and humanities; language learning is promoted greatly through the use of the traditional type of language laboratories (where language learning is only partially promoted through the use of the Internet). The curriculum is so designed that the emphasis is on teaching ESP with the greater focus on enhancing students communication skills and preparing them for job oriented and domain specific applications. This approach facilitates the integration of technology and helps the teachers encourage students to access the web for doing skill related activities. It is integrating here to note that quite a number of teachers have started integrating technological tools like blogs, wikis and podcasts for enhancing students' language skills (Udupa, 2011).

Given the global trends, it is obvious that English has become the acceptable language for commercial, political, technological and academic communication and has to some extent, attained the status of major world language. As the language bag of the internet, the use of other languages is slowed in some cases because of the difficulty of adopting them to the English based keyboard. According to Ike-Nwafor (2005), it has been observed that the new technologies are influencing not just the student's language use (both oral and

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written) but also their pattern of thought and perception. The majority of the students have adopted a new language of English abbreviations (contractions) acronyms, emoticons avatars, semantics and grammatical deviations.

In recent years, specifically in most class and assignment work, the above semantic and grammatical deviations are evident. For example, 'd' (the), 'biz' (busy), 'Lol'. (laugh out loud), 't' (tomorrow), 'agrov' (aggravated), '2' (to) 'ur' (your), 'wkend' (weekend), '5yn' (fine), 'u' (you), 'fb' (facebook) 'lye' (lie), 'morn' (morning), etc: Recent interactions with students have also shown that such abbreviations and acronyms etc are regularly used to speed up conversation when chatting on line or when sending notes or SMS by cell-phones. It is also evident that students generally take delight in such abbreviations when they are attending lectures as well as writing homework or assignments. The implication of such usage is that it compounds the existing problems since English is taught and learnt as a second language in Nigerian schools.

Aside from the situation presented above, the use of internet has also given birth to a linguistic change in communication patterns. For examples, as the new technology grows, new idioms, slangy expressions, and colloquialisms have emerged and are now used in day-to-day conversation. Examples include: Log in, log out, chat me, ping you, getting off – line for a few minutes, turn to download – turn later, Y2k compliance – being up – to date and Ball out – to leave.

Moreover, Internet have become a way of life and technologies have challenged

the traditional conception of teaching and learning by not only increasing access to knowledge which hitherto was solely controlled by the teacher but also providing varied facilities and resources for classroom interactions which break the barrier created by the walls of the classroom and propel learners to fluency.

The use of Internet in language teaching enriches classroom learning environment and deepens the learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The learning activities involving the use of Internet are authentic and these make learners stay longer on language tasks, and are naturally motivated to keep learning even when the teacher is not around (British Council, 2013). The use of Internet facilitates networking among language teachers within a particular linguistic environment and/or outside it. By this practice, best practices are being shared, and their knowledge and teaching skills enhanced. The different packages and menus provide potent tools for language teaching and help the language teacher take care of individual language learning problems that may arise.

Furthermore, the use of electronic mail is also very instrumental to language teaching and should be integrated into language education in Nigerian schools. This facility can be used for linguistic interaction between learners and the teachers and feedback got instantly. It is also capable of helping the learners perform language tasks in collaboration with learners elsewhere. With this linguistic approach, the teacher can equally add his/her e-mail to evaluate and monitor the interactions.

Aside from the above, the place of



word processing as an ideal package for language education is vital. This should be integrated in the English language teacher curricular as it has a lot of facilities that when used by the teacher in teaching, learners will become naturally sensitive to errors, wrong-spellings, grammatical mistakes, omissions and other forms of deviations in English language. The facilities in it allow the learners to delete, move, replace, insert, check for spelling or grammar; at the end of each task, what is derived is error free and this has motivational advantage on the learners to explore more.

Gap master is also desirable in language education. This Internet package can be used by a proficient teacher to develop language activities or exercises that will suit each individual learner or groups of learners. As a matter of fact, this package will enable the teacher to address the perennial problem of large class-sizes. Another important aspect of this package is that, it can be used to generate various language activities ascribed to individual learner's language needs/problems and at the same time, keep them all busy with self-paced and self-monitored tasks (British Council, 2013).

The use of story-board or MP3 and MP4 as Internet packages is also important in language teaching and learning. Izuagba (2010) opines that these packages can be effectively used by the language teacher to stimulate interest of children in reading. It is also reported that stories and music can be sourced from story board or stored in MP3 and 4 and subsequently used in teaching any aspect of English language. The use of on-line interaction and chat room is also desirable in language teaching. If integrated,

it helps an Internet skilled English teacher to expose his/her students to this package and its use enhances the intelligibility of the students in communication and makes the learners not only learn new structure but become sensitive to accuracy, adequacy and appropriateness in English language usage.

In addition to the above, the teaching and learning of the audio-aural skills (listening, understanding and leading) can now be better enhanced by digital laboratories. On the teaching and learning of phonetics and phonology, Internet has gone far towards improving the state of the art as Emenanjo (2000) states that the huge immobile language laboratories are now being replaced by more compact, mobile, collapsible laboratories which can function as both classrooms and language laboratories.

### **Internet as a Linguistic Medium for Teaching English**

The last few decades have witnessed a growth in the role of the English Language around the world as the lingua franca for economic, scientific, and political exchange. The term lingua franca means "any language used for communication between groups who have no other language in common". According to Crystal (2007), 85% of the world's international organizations use English as their official language in transnational communication. About 85% of the world's important film productions and markets use English language as well, and 90% of the published academic articles in several academic fields, such as linguistics, are written in English.

With the introduction of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), the

internet has gradually become an important linguistic medium for the teaching and learning of English language. It has been added to every aspect of human life, including the learning of languages. With the advent of the internet, computers, both in society and in the classroom, have been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication.

### **Internet as a Linguistic Tool for Language Acquisition and Usage**

With the introduction of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) via the internet, the internet has produced ever growing impact on the lexical, phonetic, syntactic standards of language and the great importance that most teachers place, or should put, on the use of “correct” language. For example, the internet has given birth to the evolution of an abbreviated English language that in chat groups and in what is referred to as the virtual world. Examples for this feature include, 2day (today), cu (see you), b4 (before), RUOK? (Are you ok?), c%l (cool) 5yn (fine), 2u (two), biz (busy), 2 (to), ur (your), u (you), Lol (Laugh out loud), to mention a few. Capital letters are also given syllabic values, as in thN (then), nEd (need) in internet communications. In one creation such as, ru2cnmel8r? (Are you two seeing me later?), less than half the characters used in the traditional sentence formation are used.

From the examples provided above, it is obvious that sentence length will tend to be short and that certain types of complex structures (relative clauses for example) will be avoided in internet communication. Also in everyday conversation, terms from the

computer technology are given a new application among people who want their talk to have a “cool” tone (In slang-great terrific). Such examples include: It's my turn to download now (I've heard all your gossip, now hear mine), she's multitasking (she is doing two things at once) Eyu later (farewell-see you later). The internet seems to have important implications for linguistics or language learning. From this illustration, this paper examines the impact of the internet on today's teaching and learning of the English language. Ben-Cannan (2006) opines that learners of English Language today need a new set of critical and interpretative skills which is part of the goals of language education towards self-directed learning.

The implication of the above is that students become motivated to learn new concepts in language and other language contents that might otherwise lack excitement. Students are also encouraged to use and engage the internet for every linguistic topic. The use of internet enables students to connect their learning to real-world, work-related situations, which also enable learners to become better students. Simple word processing skills become World Wide Web (www) pre-requisites. Students would have more responsibility for self-directed learning, critical thinking and self-assessment with the aid of the internet language learning.

Experience has shown that many students also visit websites for other reasons such as watching pornography. Students could be shown on the web the correct usage of certain English words, their formation, application, usage and meanings. It is thus obvious that the chances of wider use of

internet for language teaching looks bright and could be attributed to the efforts taken by leading organizations such as English Language Teachers' Association of India, who take great interest in educating language teachers in integrating technology with classroom teaching through language teacher training programmes.

### **Challenges for Integrating Internet to Language Education in Nigeria**

Globally, and in Nigeria in particular, the integration of internet into schools and its implementation has not been easy, and researchers have been concerned about the barriers that have been militating against effective integration of internet in education. Although, teachers recognize the positive value of internet in education, difficulties however continue to be experienced within the processes of adopting these technologies. Major challenges to integrating internet to language education in Nigeria are;

- **Information and communication technology phobia:** Apart from the fact that some teachers have undergone internet training, a large number of teachers still chose not to use Internet in teaching their lessons because of their lack of Internet skills for pedagogical reason. Coupled with that is the fact that some students too are scared of utilizing Internet facilities to enhance their studies (Unamba, 2009).
- **Poor infrastructural facilities:** The problems of poor infrastructural facilities have been the major cause of setback in the integration of internet

into teaching in most Nigerian schools. In many Nigerian schools, most of these Internet packages are not available.

- **Finance:** Considering the growth of technologies globally, it is evident that more sophisticated Internet equipment keep evolving to improve the quality of teaching-learning process. The materials and equipment in Internet centres are in most cases foreign-based and hence a lot of money is needed to purchase them. Coupled with this is the fact that their maintenance and preservative measures are money consuming.
- **Inadequate supply of power:** The issue of power supply in Nigeria has become a national ailment that has for long refused solution. This is a very serious challenge and of course a subject of discourse in every home in Nigeria. It is a source of natural discouragement to the users of electronic devices. It is rather unfortunate that most institutions of higher learning rely heavily on generators whereas; there is no financial support for the purchase of diesel or petrol to keep the generators on for effective utilization of internet packages. Both the teachers and the students in most schools are generally affected by the menace of this worrisome epileptic electric supply.
- **Poor attitude of governmentsto funding:** Recent trends in educator sector have shown the position of the types of leadership and government we have in the present democratic dispensation. It is rather worrisome and unfortunate that our leaders both at the



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state and national levels pay lip service to educational issues. The failure of the government to provide necessary facilities in Nigerian schools has been responsible for incessant strike actions in the entire institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

From the discussion above, it is obvious that the internet has become an integral part of language teaching in Nigerian schools and its use offers an enhancement in the overall knowledge transfer process and learning experience. Rapid advances in technology are driving a new instructional paradigm - the transition from physical to virtual learning environment. From the foregoing, it is obvious that since its conception, the internet has revolutionised the ways of human communication as well as English language learning in a global context. It is heartening to see the prospects in the use of internet in English language and the boom in the IT industry that has opened new opportunities in turn for language teaching.

### **Recommendations**

The introduction of distance education via internet pedagogy has drastically changed the roles of language teachers, thus there is the need to equip English language teachers with new types of syllabus, materials, tasks and activities, and assessment and evaluation. It requires the training of new teachers and readiness of the students.

To cope in the era of internet in English language teaching, students can no longer be "spoon-fed." To help them achieve their own objectives and pursue their life-long education, teachers themselves have to change their roles in language class. In the "global classroom", the teacher must be the facilitator who provides comprehensible input and gives feedback to the students' output. The task requires a lot of responsibility, skills, knowledge and devotion because teachers have to learn about their students' computer background, language abilities as well as their linguistic backgrounds, cognitive and academic abilities. Also, teachers have to provide immediate feedback and create co-operation among students.

Government should be ready to provide more sophisticated internet equipment in Nigerian schools as this will keep evolving to improve the quality of teaching-learning process. The issue of power supply in Nigeria and Nigerian schools in particular has been a source of natural discouragement to the users of electronic devices. Therefore, governments, school administrators and other stakeholders should try as much as possible to address this national embarrassment in education sector.

Governments should also provide enabling environment that would allow donor agencies or private investors particularly those in information sector to take full advantage of recent advances in information technology to equip educational institutions in Nigeria.

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