

CONNECTIVIST APPROACH TO ENGLISH-FRENCH EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The article is about the relevance of ICT measures to quality and pragmatic English-French Education in Nigerian higher institutions. The study looks into the roles of different ICT materials in preparing young graduates for various linguistic challenges that could deter personal socio-economic growth in the 20th century in an anglophone country that is bordered by French speaking nations on all sides. The objectives are to draw the attention of lecturers of the two languages to the importance of ICT measures in their teaching exercises, to awaken the learners of English and French languages to the need to see the provision of electronic media as a means to greater academic excellence other than for mere social interactions and to encourage government, institutions and even parents to show more commitment to the adequate and timely provisions and maintenance of technology materials that could improve linguistic competence. The research which is narrative adopts the literature review method for data collection. The application of ICT measures for better academic and professional results is an area that has been comprehensively looked into by various scholars. The article therefore, relies on reports from related literature for data. Though the role of ICT in different areas of education especially in the linguistic domain has been extensively treated, educationlike life is very dynamic, the significance of the study is its delving into new and more recent types of technology tools and their uses to equip Nigerian young graduates to meet up with the linguistic competence needed to face the challenges arising from the demands of globalization.

Keywords: ICT, English language, French language, Education

Introduction

English and French are two international languages spoken and taught in Nigerian education institutions for various reasons. They were both colonial languages in Africa, while Nigeria having been colonized by Britain adopted English as official language; other African countries many of which are Nigerian neighbours speak French as official

language being former French colonies. At the global level, English and French languages have stood out as the most widely spoken languages.

Nigeria is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The ECOWAS Treaty which was signed into law in 1975 has 15 West African member states which speak either English or French as official language. As one of the pillars of the Africa's economic community, ECOWAS was set up to foster the ideal of collective self-sufficiency for its members through cooperation. The aim of the community is to promote unity, integration, acceptable standard of living, economic stability and progress in the African continent (ECOWAS Commission, 2024). While ECOWAS covers only West Africa, the African Union (AU) is about the entire African continent where diverse colonial and numerous local languages are spoken in different regions of the continent.

Like ECOWAS, the African Union (AU) was equally established to foster progress and unity among Africans. It is a continental body consisting of 55 member states that made up the countries of the African continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999). The main objectives of the OAU include getting rid of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid and then promote panafricanism which is solidarity among African states in order to achieve cooperation, development and international integration.

The African Union was officially launched in July, 2002 in Durba, South Africa to create a new continental organization following a consensus by African leaders in September, 1999 that to realize Africa's potentials, there was a need to shift attention from the fight against colonization and racism which had been the focus of OAU to increased cooperation and integration of a peaceful Africa for socio-economic growth and development in a dynamic and global arena. (African Union Commission, 2024).

Adeuga (2008:157) taught that of the over 50 African Union member nations, 23 speak French, 19 speak English and the remaining speak Arabic or Portuguese. According to Kenneally (1999:49), there are about 10,000 languages in the world and half of the world's population speaks only 10 of them, English being the most dominant of the 10 followed by French. (Halliday, 1978) stated that "the basic functions of language are communication, representation, expression and social interactions. These enable man convey information and ideas, express emotions and build relationship with others." Language is intimately connected with activities, desires, emotions, thoughts and all the business of man.

An average Nigerian needs the English language for communication, social interaction and economic purposes. The knowledge of French language for a Nigerian is then an added advantage and a very beneficial one if the individual is well groomed in the two languages. "Any developing society that is aspiring to be a member of developed nations eventually must be ready to accommodate more of the world's major languages in order

to gain access to international resources" (Johnstone, 2005). The need to lay continuous emphasis on the role of ICT in the teaching and learning of English and French languages in modern Nigeria can therefore not be over emphasized.

English-French Education in Nigeriaina Dynamic Era:

Language education has gone beyond preparation for good grades in examinations, it is now about preparation to overcome major linguistic barriers on the ways of different socio-economic activities at personal, institutional and international levels. The modern and formal education now involves teaching and learning and a regular relationship between the teacher and the learner in a conducive environment with the aid of appropriate materials within a specified period. Teaching is now the process whereby the well trained personnel in a certain discipline imparts relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to learners for personal and societal development. Learning is therefore aimed at bringing about a very relative change in behavior through experiences.

English-French education is the teaching and learning of these languages through various pedagogical methods. It involves exposing the learners to listening, speaking, reading and writing of the languages as well as the civilizations and cultures of the speakers of the languages. Developing the speaking competence in order to overcome linguistic challenges on the ways of socio-economic plans should be primary in language education today especially for English and French learners. Teachers in these domains should therefore be prepared towards training the learners to be able to confidently communicate orally and graphically.

Graduates of English and French could look beyond Nigeria for employment and businesses if they are competent, they could confidently compete for international jobs which could bring relief to Nigerian labor market. In the opinion of Osisanwo (2003:17), "no nation is an island to herself, the whole world is now in the age of computer which has turned it into a global village, certainly there is need for genuine global interaction." The mastery of English and French languages will be of great help in this respect.

Formerly, teaching was exclusively achieved with the traditional method of the physical meeting of the teacher and the learner in the classroom especially in Africa. Today, the process of formal education has gone beyond the level of face to face classroom contact in front of the chalkboard. ICT, one of the globally acknowledged teaching and learning tool and a key propellant of globalization has permeated and transformed every sphere of human endeavours including the education ministry. Aremu (2011:64-76) wrote about technological innovations going hand in hand with the development of language teaching especially English.

Education is a social phenomenon which should not be static but elastic and responsive to changes. This explains why international languages educators have adopted diverse motivational media which include textbooks, magazines, newspapers, journals, radio, television and most recently the internet. ``The electronic media has become particularly

important even in remote villages, it is an effective medium of language and cultural awareness," Onuegbu (2004:56).

ICT and Quality Language Education in Nigerian Modern Tertiary Institutions

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become within a very short time, one of the basic building blocks of modern society. Many countries now regard ICT as part of core education along with reading, writing and numeracy (Abolade et al, 2005:19-22). According to (Nwosu, 2003: 58-60) the introduction of information technology in teaching would serve dual purposes, which are acculturation and efficient instruction. According to him, acculturation wise, a learner who is being prepared for technologically oriented world needs to be immersed into technology early.

The use of ICT emanated from the application of mass media for more effective education. During the 20th century, the introduction of mass media was driven by technology which allowed the massive duplication of materials in printing and film production. Progressively, radio and television came into the scene as electronic devices which aided mass diffusion of knowledge and information around the world. Encarta Dictionary (2006:981) says "mass media is all of the communication media that reach a large audience." In the 21st century, the development and wide use of computers such as blogs, mobile phones, laptops, tablets and the internet gave way to a more dynamic way of reaching a large audience through technology.

E-learning is a formal learning system aided by electronic source which makes teaching in and out of the classroom possible through the use of computers and the internet. This network system enables the transfer of skills, knowledge and information to large number of recipients either at the same time or at different times. "Earlier, it was not fully accepted as it was assumed to lack the human element required in learning. However, with the rapid progress in technology and the advancement in learning systems, it is now embraced by the masses. The introduction of computers was the bases of this revolution and with time, smart phones, tablets, laptops and other similar devices now occupy important place in learning (E-learning Wikiversity).

According to Anaza and Abdulazeez (2012:132), "the traditional mode of teaching is predominantly used in most of the educational level, the method is so prevalent that students sometimes become suspicious of any teacher who chooses a different method of teaching". Since the contemporary world is witnessing a change as a result of innovative technology one of which is Information and Communication Technology, education should not be left out of this progress. The attitude of tertiary institution students towards the application of ICT in the teaching and learning of major languages must therefore become positive because the development will make the learners become more active participants in the process.

Improving Learning Through ICT

Learning is the primary goal of any educational process and it seeks to achieve a positive change in the attitude of the learner. According to Oyekan (2007:41), some conditions

which include intelligence, maturity, sensation, perception, interest and emotion among others are very necessary for learning. Using ICT provisions to support teaching could go a long way in promoting these conditions.

ICT measures in education improves both the teacher and the learner on the long run, Nigeria cannot afford to separate ICT from education especially in this digital era. Arasomwan (2012:176) explained that "the quality of students is directly proportional to the quality of an educational system which cannot exceed the quality of its teachers". The outcomes of learning can only be improved if the instructions, the environment, the materials as well as the teachers are improved.

ICT has proved to assist the teacher to reach out unto as possible distance as many participants and different locations notwithstanding. According to Omeiza and Atiti (2012:267), "globalization and growth of borderless education through distance and online learning have raised issues that affect education across countries". The duo explained that "in the age of globalization and information, the objectives should go beyond conveying a recognized body of knowledge but equally to enhance the ability of each learner to think critically and independently, exercise appropriate judgment, collaborate with others and to adapt to new and uncertain situations. Sale (2002:87) defined e-learning as the use of electronic technology to deliver education and training, to monitor learners' performance and to report their progress. According to Sale, ICTs have the potential for increasing access to and improving the relevance and quality of education. To him, "today, real borders do not lie between nations but between those who can access ICT and those who cannot.

The application of ICT in teaching and learning have proved to improve distance and independent learning, group learning, time management, varieties, motivation, documentation, privacy, regular and consistent monitoring. Going by Tagoe (2012:21) "the need for people to keep on learning and updating their knowledge is highly necessary, to participate effectively in the global market, graduates of African institutions must constantly update their experiences through the modern ICT means".

Talking of independent and self directed learning, Tagoe (2012:21) submits that there is need to inculcate this habit of learning without necessarily being forced or monitored by the teacher all the time. Using ICT means helps the learner to achieve learning at his convenient time and place, individually or within a group. To conclude, the benefits of ICT in the learning process shall be summarized from three different perspectives, that is, the constructivist's, the facilitator's and the connectivist's perspectives.

The constructivists believe that learners should be given the chance to advance their knowledge and understanding of various subjects through experiences. It is a school of thought that believes in pragmatism, involvement and learner centeredness. According to (Rotter, 1989), the teaching-learning method in e-learning is assumed to be self-directed (SDL), it is an active information process which aids the generation of knowledge through individual experiences, maturity and interaction. The use of ICT promotes more

of students' involvement and learning is made possible the teacher's presence or absence notwithstanding. The process promotes a sense of critical judgment in learners as it encourages hearing and reading several different intellectuals of relevant areas and then drawing conclusions personally.

From the facilitator's view point, ICT measures have placed the teacher in the position of a facilitator; he or she should not be looked at as the sole source of knowledge. Aside this, ICT in education has also served as a facilitator in diverse ways. It has so far facilitated distance learning, mass communication, group learning, private attention, and continuous research to mention but a few. While a teacher physically teaches a topic once and for all, students can always employ online facilities for more clearance for as many times as desired.

The connectivist does not believe in learning in isolation, dependence on a single environment, teacher-dominating system and even usual references. It is a pragmatic and dynamic way of teaching whose primary goal is to remove all kinds of limitation and individualism by paving ways for wider horizons. Employing ICT measures opens the learner to connections, collaborations, partnership and association; this development will no doubt give birth to formidable academics in the nearest future.

Relevant Types of ICT

The 21st century has witnessed great dynamism in the area of technology with the promotion of digitalization through the computer. The development and global promotion of the computer system have obviously paved ways for the use of the internet, blogs, browsers and different kinds of computers such as desktops, laptops, tablets, and smart phones amongst others. There are also digital cameras, digital interactive tables, CD ROMS, flash drives and various electronic messaging applications such as E-library, E-mails, WhatsApp, Facebook and Artificial Intelligence amongst others which are now popularly used in different social institutions including the education sector. The measure has been used to motivate learners to achieve both group and private learning with or without the teacher.

The Internet:

The internet belongs to a wider area of the computer network which is known as Wide Area Network (WAN). A computer network consists of two or more computers that are connected which could either be in the same location or in different and very distant locations. We have the Local Area Network (LAN) and the Wide Area Network (WAN) while the former is a small network connecting computers spread out over a fairly small, local area through cables; the latter is a larger network connecting computers spread out over a wide area through telephone cables and satellite or radio connections, this could be both national and international connections. The internet is therefore groups of different LANS located in different sides and connected through communication links such as standard telephone lines, hardwired cables, microwave stations and satellite. It is primarily used to share information with other users around the world. Eyitayo and

Eyitayo (2010:5)

Blogs:

A blog is a user-generated website where postings could be quickly done to freely interact with people. Blogs often provide commentary sections on news on different subjects; they act as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines texts, images and links to other blogs, web pages and other media related to its topic. The opportunity for readers to leave comments in an interactive format makes blogs more desirable. Eyitayo (2010:35)

Browsers:

A web browser is an application for assessing websites which helps the users to retrieve files and information from a particular website through the internet. Browsers are used through such devices as laptops, tablets and smart phones. Eyitayo (2010:35)

Rich Site Summary (RSS):

RSS is commonly used by intellectuals and researchers to publish frequently updated digital materials. Its users need to subscribe to a feed and supply their readers the link to the feed. A researcher could for example create an RSS for the purpose of data collection and sharing in different relevant areas of study. It is very similar to the browser application. (Eyitayo, 2010:36)

Computer:

The computer is an electronic device that is capable of accepting, processing, applying, storing and diffusing information in coded electronic forms. According to Ugbe et al (2012:163), "the computer can also be programmed to introduce students to diverse new materials as well as serving as a tutor by presenting materials on a screen while monitoring the students' responsiveness and the effectiveness of the program. Desktops, laptops, tablets and mobile phones amongst others are good examples.

E-library:

It is a website that makes diverse books, newspapers, magazines, journals, articles and several other reading materials available to users. It is an electronic library usually to be manned by trained technologists and a place to get numerous graphic and audio materials all in digital forms. It affords the learner the opportunity to search, browse, download and share information without physically visiting the library. An individual can assess e-libraries through the computer and institutions could also make provision for this facility in their technology center. (Brooks, 2024) The e-library is a website of compiled digital resources available to users via the internet.

Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Like the name implies, this application is artificial in nature. It is a method of making a computer, a robot or software thinks intelligently like the human mind. According to Marr (2024) "it is a set of technologies that enable computer to perform a variety of

advanced functions which include understanding and translating spoken and written languages, analyzing data and making recommendations". There are four different types of AI applications in operation today. They are the Reactive, the Limited Memory, the Theory of Mind and the Self-Aware applications. This study will only promote the Limited Memory technology which is the most widely used type of AI today especially in the academic sector. The Limited Memory application learns the past and present, builds experiential knowledge by observing actions and data then analyzing, historical facts and programmed information to make predictions, recommendations and to answer researchers' questions.

Theoretical Perspective

The study adopts Connectivism as background theory. The theory attributes pragmatism and dynamism in education to learning through cyber modes which is specifically rooted in social networks. According to (Siemens, 2004) "modern day learning occurs through network connections as individuals share their interests, knowledge, perspectives, expertise and opinions in online or virtual learning environments". He says connectivism is a learning theory comprising of different series of modes to connect hundreds networks to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous learning. These connections according to (Dunaway, 2011) provide individuals with direct access to reliable information from millions of sources. It is a 21st century learning theory, a digital age when the rate of technological change does not seem to be on the declining side, and a period when technology is leading to massive changes in economy, communication, relationship and education. "In this era of almost total connectivity and of an acquisitive social media, universities must find ways of learning more permeable and fluid paths toward open-source content and student-centered learning experience", Kamenetz (2010:130)

Education wise, both teachers and learners at all levels especially in Africa, a developing continent should be very conscious with the massive challenges of change in acquiring the necessary skills that are fit for an increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex knowledge-based modern society. In the labor field, entering and sustaining employment in the 21st century society, according to Conference Board of Canada (2016) earnestly require fundamental skills of mass communication, personal management skills and teamwork skills as foremost. According to Herlo (2010:331), "the focus on the skills needed in a digital age raises questions about why educators must not just focus on the accuracy of knowledge but mostly on the skills required for a knowledge-based society. Often referred to as the 21st century skills". The significance of this study is to add value to French education in Nigeria tertiary institutions through ICT provisions.

Challenges and Recommendation

Though challenges are most often disturbing and unwelcome, they have always been part of life experiences. Challenges are not meant to remain permanent features; man in his quest for development must therefore seek for solutions to challenges. In the light of this preamble, the following challenges have been identified and some recommendations have been made to pave ways for progress.

Adequate provision of necessary ICT materials by the government, the institutions and enough support to students by the parents still need more attention. To say that Nigeria has not supported ICT in education is to deny a fact, but the growing number of institutions and students is calling for more financial support from the various stakeholders.

Funds allocated to institutions need to be judiciously used. Establishing computer resource centers in higher institutions needs serious financial commitment. Serene environment, spacious centers with internet connections and very regular electricity supply are what constitute standard and modern technology centers. Items such as projectors, computers, digital cameras, microphones, digital interactive tables, CD-ROMS, flash drives amongst others should be available in quantity and in quality. These items would also need regular servicing while obsolete items need regular replacement. Individual institutions need to bridge the digital divide through teaching. To achieve this, lecturers could introduce on-line lectures, give assignments that would need browsing and in fact exploit the various messaging applications like E-mails, WhatsApp amongst others for notes, assignments, assessments and even monitoring. All these could be achieved both in group and at individual levels.

In most cases, technicians are not employed to manage the language Laboratories and in fact other similar centers. Lecturers who are not too familiar with technology therefore dodge the use of such centers to avoid exposing his or her incompetence to students. So, most technology centers lie underused and often, the materials become obsolete. Adequate and well qualified technicians should be employed into the various technology centers. They need not just be employed but be handsomely remunerated to avoid brain drain.

Ugbe (2012:163) submits that "familiarity with computer technology and availability of the facilities will determine the level of progress". For Nigerian institutions to achieve this feat, regular on-the-job training needs to be respected. Workshops, seminars and conferences geared towards rebuilding technologists should be given attention. Lecturers in different departments, especially the Departments of English and French should be made to benefit from such technical trainings from time to time. This will boost their competence and as such would be able to motivate students on the issue of on-line education. Many lecturers are still far from being computer literate. Computer literacy should be part of the requirements for employment.

Conclusion

The benefits of ICT measures in Nigerian education system in the current global era can no longer be overemphasized. According to Arasomwan (2012:185), there is great gain to be made in integrating ICT's in the education systems of developing countries provided the right conditions are fulfilled. These conditions include the availability of relevant software, hardware, competence pedagogical team, steady power supply, an enabling environment and an obvious attitude of interest. To achieve this great feat, all hands need to be on deck, it is a collaborative exercise that needs the support of the government, the various educational institutions, the support of the parents and encouragement from the teachers as well as readiness from the learners.

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