

## **A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY IN DIGITAL AGE: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The spread of English as an international language and the emergence of the Internet as a fast communication channel are dual issues that define English Language Teaching in a globalised and digital age. Since its conception, the Internet has revolutionised the ways of human communication as well as English language learning in a global context. The use of Internet in the English language pedagogy is a novel tradition in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. In Nigerian socio-cultural setting, the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of English as a second language has become common place. Teachers of English as a second language in Nigeria have commenced the act of updating their knowledge in computer literacy. However, the implications of this powerful force are yet to be fully recognised and realised in education and teacher education. Teachers of English language as well as learners of the language today, need a new set of critical and interpretative skills. This study discusses the impacts and the implications of the Internet on English language learning as well as the need for new frameworks for teaching English language in a digital age. The theoretical framework for this study is Canale's (1983) concept of "communicative teaching". The choice of this theory is based on the fact that teaching a language requires taking the students into an environment they can easily employ the target language in a real life situation. Data for this study were generated from textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, seminar paper presentations, and internet materials. The study reveals that all over

the world, the use of information and communication technology is changing the face of teaching, learning and research. Thus, the dynamic of globalisation, and information and communication technologies on our economic, social, education, and cultural life, though offering novel opportunities, pose challenges to the dispensation of education in the current times. The study concludes that there is need to help teachers develop the appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, and perspectives to teach English in the light of digital age. To prepare this new generation of teachers, we need a teacher education system that is not only globally but also technologically compliant.

**Key words:** English Language, Pedagogy, Digital age, ICT, Teaching and Learning

## **Introduction**

Much has been written about the colonial attribute of the English language. One senses among a section of the applied linguistics community, a critical awareness of the fact that the English language, in its long march to its current global status, was aided and abetted by colonialist and imperialist projects that trampled upon the political, cultural and linguistic heritage of millions of people across the globe (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: p539-550). “A language achieves a genuinely global status observes Crystal (1997:2), “when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country”. Clearly, English has achieved such a role. In that global role, English has spawned a large number of local varieties, aptly called ‘World Englishes. An interesting aspect of the emergence of World Englishes is that it is not confined to former British colonies alone. In addition to *English* in India, Singlish in Singapore, etc., one now hears about *Franglais* in France, *Denglish* in Germany, and so on.

The emergence of Word Englishes with their amazing form, function and spread has been the result of what Kachru (1982, 1983)

has called nativisation. Varieties such as Indian English, Nigerian English and Singaporean English represent the extent to which a foreign language can be profitably reconstructed into a vehicle for expressing sociocultural norms and networks that are typically local. Creative writers such as Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe and others have shown the Western language can be used for communicating sociocultural nuances that are completely alien to the Western culture. Common people who speak English as an additional language see it more as a language of communicational necessity than as a symbol of cultural identity. They use English according to their individual and institutional needs, and keep it separate from their local cultural beliefs and practices.

Nativisation, however, is not the same as decolonization (Kumaravadivelu, 2002:p45-61). In the context of the World Englishes, nativisation may be seen as an attribute of a language whereas decolonisation is an attitude of the mind. Nativisation is a relatively simple process of indigenising the phonological, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of the linguistic system of the English language – a target that has been largely achieved. Decolonisation is a fairly complex process of taking control of the principles and practices of planning, learning, and teaching English – a task that has not been achieved. Nativisation only marks the beginning, not the end of the process of decolonization. To erase the lingering traces of English imperialism and to claim ownership of the English language learning and teaching enterprise, it is imperative to move from nativisation to decolonisation.

A meaningful movement from nativisation to decolonization necessarily involves significant shifts in policies and programmes and in methods and materials governing English language teaching (ELT). It involves not only decentring the authority Western interests have over the ELT industry but also, more importantly, restoring agency to

professionals in the periphery communities. There are signs that the ELT profession is moving, albeit painfully slowly, in that direction. However, adequate attention has not been given to a pedagogical area that matters most: classroom methodology (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:p540).

The last few decades have also seen a growth in the role of the English language around the world as the lingua franca for economic, scientific, educational and political exchange. Today, 85% of the world's international organisations use English as their official language in international communication (Crystal, 1997). Language is a very important instrument for global networking and English language in particular has facilitated the development of globalization, Information Communication Technologies.

#### **. Methodology**

The data for this study were gotten from secondary sources that consisted of textbooks, government publications, peer-reviewed journals and newspapers. The adoption of this technique was based on the accessibility of these materials to the researcher. The strategy was to examine issues actually presented to illustrate a critical perspective on English language in digital age.

#### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical perspective for this study is based on Canale's (1983) concept of "communicative teaching". To Canale (1983:p22-27), teaching a language requires taking the students into an environment in which they can easily employ the target language in a real life situation. Communicative language teaching has its root in Dell Hyme's (1972:p289-93) concept of "communicative competence". According to Hyme's (1972), communicative competence presupposes the ability of a child/ student to effectively employ a target or second large in a real life situation. In this process, language teacher needs to employ practical task such as spelling drills,

impromptu speeches, debating programmes, essay and letter writing drills, playlets, rhymes etc in teaching a target language so as to make the students to be able to effectively use such a target language in all real life situations. In the view of Canale (1983), teaching language as a communication involves the development of the student's strategic, grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. Grammatical competence implies "the mastery of the rules in the target language". It relates to what Chomsky (1965) termed "linguistic competence". The sociolinguistic competence presupposes the understanding of the social and conventional rules of language use. Such sociolinguistic rules involves having the knowledge of what to say, how to say it, when and where to say it and to whom. Discourse competence refers to the ability to manipulate language form and rhetorical devices to achieve specific communicative purpose. It also relates to having the knowledge of text construction. Strategic competence, according to Canale (1983) implies the ability to overcome the communicative and situational problems, as they arise, through the manipulation of linguistic forms and resources as well as the extra-linguistic devices such as turn-taking, gap-filing, etc. Aremu (2008) recommends the pragmatic strategy as an approach in the concept of communicative language teaching. In the view of Aremu (2008), a language teacher needs to employ his/her mutual contextual beliefs and background world knowledge (i.e. social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge) to contextualise his/her teaching. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003:p9), "we listen and speak, write and read not only about the world ... much of what we understand depends on exactly where we and language are located in the world". This statement implies that experience of the world often affects our use of language.

### **Empirical Review**

Existing studies on the employment of ICT in English Language pedagogy include Egbe (2009). Fehring (2001), Aremu (2010), Aremu

& Sulymon (2012), Oni & Osunbade (2009), Gruber (1998:p21-45), Oni (2007), Darhower (2002:p249-277), Alabi (2005), Durrant & Green (2001), etc. According to Durrant and Green (2001:p142-164) cited in Aremu (2011: p64-76), ICT presupposes the employment of the computer and electronic gadgets to disseminate information and elicit responses from any communicative utterances. Such technological information, according to Alabi (2005), can be accessed through the utilization of mobile cell phones, computer and internet. ICT is a digital technology used in storing, retrieving and disseminating information in contemporary jet age. In the view of Alabi (2005) and Horstein (2000), the technological and internet literacy is germane in the contemporary democratically organized education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The use of ICT packages like video-conferencing, teleconferencing, etc helps in the teaching and learning of English Language. According to Adeleke (2009), ICT helps in presenting interactive instructional aids on specific subject matter, assessment of student's progress and understanding of instructional material. Series of computer-based packages which are useful in the teaching of English as a second language abound in recent in recent times. These include: Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL), Computer-Based Language Training (CBLT), Computer-Aided Language Assessment (CALA),

The Computer Based Language Training (CBLT) can be employed in teaching a wide or vast range of subjects, including language based topics. CBLT is a software which was developed to train a wide range of students on the acquisition of skills in a target language without the tutor being present. CBLT is a digital package and an interactive multimedia which can combine text, audio, and graphic video, and animation with having a meaningful interaction with students. It is a digital tool that facilitates the language teaching and language learning in Europe, America, Latin American nations

(e.g. Cuba, Argentina, Eritrea, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, etc), Asian countries (e.g. Malaysia, Kuwait, Iraq, Israel, Iran, India etc) and in some African nations (e.g. South-Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Tanzania, and Botswana).

Also, the computer aided language assessment (CALA) package is an automated package used in/for assessing student's understanding of language instructional skills. Coupled with foregoing is the employment of Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL) through which a teacher of English as a second language (ESL) for example in Nigeria can create internet-based simulations for role-playing activities in language learning. The simulations incorporating e-mails, charts and online creation and editing of documents are taught to motivate the oral and written communication among the participating group. In this method, students will be guided through scenarios relevant to the social cultural contexts as well as the scenarios relevant to the socio-cultural contexts and background of the native speakers of the English language. The teachers of English language in Nigeria always employ computer to create internet-based simulation for role-playing activities in learning English as a L2. In Pakistan, their government has created what is called "Rural Kiosk machine" designed in Pakistan for improving the competence of the rural areas in the use of English as a L2. This "Rural Kiosk" has digital multilingual interface to support rural communities speaking different languages in the use and usage of English as a second language . Nigerian government often fails to give proper finance to providing the digital tools in teaching English as a second language. Anything that Nigerian government does towards education is often politicised. That always makes ICT facilities provided in a very few secondary schools in some states in Nigeria to be stolen few months after they were supplied. Many of the ICT buildings in Nigerian secondary schools are often employed as "visitors' sitting rooms" or "staff

rooms”. As a result, many of them are not well- equipped with digital gadgets. This has led to poor utilisation of ICT in the English language pedagogy in Nigeria. (Aremu, 2010; Egbe, 2009).

### **Integration of ICT and Education**

The impact of ICT on the knowledge-based society has brought major changes. In terms of form and content, it has had a massive and multiplying effect, to such an extent that the purpose of knowledge has come to permeate the wider society, with education being among the broadest implications and developments brought thereby. The school is one of the venues where technology has had the greatest impact, which in turn has had an effect on the role of the teacher and become a part of the school everyday life.

The integration of ICT into education has become a process whose implications go far beyond the technological tools nurturing the educational environment. The ideas of teaching construction and the way one can build and consolidate meaningful learning based on technology are now being discussed, or the technological use of education, in strictly pedagogical terms. The transformation of ICT has allowed these to become educational tools that could further improve the educational quality of the student and revolutionalise the way information is obtained, managed and interpreted (Aguilar, 2012:p345).

As part of the roles played by each educational agent, students currently use technological tools to facilitate learning. This development began early on with the emergency of calculators, TV sets, and voice recorders, among other. However, such has been the progress that technological resources have become educational resources, where efforts to improve learning entail task of involving technology with education. And it is with teaching that the teaching-learning process is being completed. The use of ICT means breaking with traditional media, boards, pens, etc, and it has given way to a

teaching role based on the need for training in and updating one's knowledge of teaching methods based on current requirements.

Cabero (2005:p77-100) states that the emerging technologies were created outside an educational context and were later integrated into it. Education, as a relevant aspect in human life, has combine with ICT to create a new learning environment where students take responsibility for their own learning, where time and flexibility play a major role, as education becomes increasingly digital, as digitalisation has become a revolution, and as new technologies converge into emerging educational and pedagogical paradigm.

### **Educational Challenges Facing the Use of ICT in Nigeria**

The far-reaching changes brought to education by technology were discussed above. Hence one should bear in mind that the main challenge now is how to address this technological approach to the teaching and learning process. Technology and its contributions are evolving and changing the fields of knowledge very quickly. It is here that it can be appreciated that education, as a discipline, is taking on new challenges that deserves a more detail study.

In Nigeria, Teachers are faced with the transformative vision of a society that needs to integrate ICT into the classroom, and seen their role change into that of agents with the ability to generate the necessary skills for a society 'yearning' for technological knowledge and the frequent use thereof in various educational matters.

Successfully integrating ICT into education depends to a large extent on the teacher's ability to structure the learning environment. There is much talk about giving the "leap" forward and "breaking up" traditional formulas with cooperation and teamwork-based learning. However, the use and involvement of ICT in education has not yet been understood as a tool through which meaningful learning can be granted. Granted frequent mistakes and transmission of information, a

misconception that continue to plague traditional education. (Mestres, 2008:p343).

Teachers must structure their role by organising the way students acquire cognitive competences and manage to apply them in different situations. Classroom teaching will require new spaces so as to add to current knowledge through the use of technological media by both students and teachers. The emergence of ICT easily fits into this process. Students participate as new educational agents, who have become a major element for communication and social interaction as a result of being born in a high-tech society.

The diversity of scenarios, context and trends in education currently impose new roles on the training process which brings challenges for future professionals and the institutions and agents responsible for their education.

There are costs involved and poorer students and educational establishments may end up being disadvantaged. This is often referred to as being in the **digital divide**. Students, and sometimes teachers can get hooked on the technology aspect, rather than the subject content. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and other social media networking sites can be a distraction living and learning in the real world. According to Olaore (2014:p156) advertisers take advantage of the big data that exists in the interface of users of these networking sites and market their various goods and services to the users. Educational institutions are not except from this marketing effort of the big data houses such as Google, Microsoft, Yahoo etc. There are services geared towards the institutions offering them free Internet hosting and data storage space in the cloud in exchange for access to their data availability for analysis and advertising.

### **Perspective on the future of ICT on Education in Nigeria**

The use of ICT in education has increasingly become an essential element of the educational environment. Accompanied by

technological tools, use of ICT in education is to become an increasingly ever-present reality in society, hence expansion to embrace students, teachers and educational institutions will result in optimization of the teaching –learning process.

Undoubtedly, an analysis of different views in the education sector shows the importance and growing perspective of technology, which would advance social and collaborative learning, with a dimension capable of fostering the liaison between current societies and an educational that is both transformative and adaptable. Diaz-Barriga (2013:p343) states that at present, education may not be conceived of separately from ICT or deny the lent by ICT to education. From this perspective, it is hard to evoke any educational innovation that is not tied to technological developments.

There is talk of integrating ICT in education once the educational system is in a position to design meaningful learning generated through experiences and a reflective content capable of having both students and teachers generate knowledge. The above is focused not only on the classroom. Every space and moment where learning occurs must conceive of the idea of becoming this signal achievement.

ICTs, as technological tools have increased the degree of significance and educational conception establishing new models of communication, besides generating spaces for training, information, debate, reflection, among others, as well as breaking up the barriers of traditionalism in the classroom. The teaching learning process in the classroom, using ICT, requires a set of skills to be developed by the teacher with a view to internalizing a methodology to make the most of technological tools, in which teacher training shall be deemed among the first options prior to facing new educational challenges.

In the context of ideas above, the transition from traditional education to a knowledge acquisition-based society has been no easy

task. The functional role of teachers within this approach not only requires a change in their methodological practices, but a change of mind involving their beliefs in different environments where learning can be achieved.

The contribution of ICTs to education and society in Nigeria is undoubtedly its flexibility and adaptability to an increasingly changing environment. While at the outset labor was mainly affected by this process, however, the passage of time has shown that society depends on a technological approach to help it build and acquire knowledge.

ICTs, in their role as tools added to pedagogical models, can become valuable resources for learning and for equipping students with appropriate personal and professional skills for a country's development.

The 2002 publication *2020 Visions, Transforming Education and Training through Advanced Technologies* shows the different contexts in which educational institutions will forge the use of ICT in education. A collection of articles, the volume explores the feasibility of this technology, where assessment of aspects such as physical space, materials, teaching models, monitoring and evaluation and teacher training are some of the issues to be addressed by education if the latter is to adopt a more objective approach towards the importance of ICT in education.

According to Tapia & Leon (2013:p344), integration of ICT in education must be accompanied by a series of guidelines defining a framework for decision-making regarding the actions to be taken during the process. It identifies three dimensions: (1) information related to access to, shaping and transformation of new knowledge and digital environment information; (2) Communication connected with collaboration, teamwork, and technological adaptability; (3)

Ethics and Social Impact, linked to the competences needed to face the ethical challenges of globalisation and the rise of ICT.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

It has been shown through this study that despite the few negative effects of ICT like misuse of it for watching pornography and using it for fraud, the usage of automated tool in English Language pedagogy will not only help develop the technical know-how in Nigeria, but it will equally help advance the nation's economy. The findings reveal that ICT usage in language pedagogy will not only help develop the communicative competence of the students in English as a target language, but it will also help facilitates the teaching and learning processes in Nigeria and the world at large. As a result, government needs to equip each secondary school in Nigeria with automated gadgets like computer, projectors, and other digital tools in order to not only improve second languages, but also help develop the nation technologically.

### **Conclusion**

All over the world, the use of information and communication technology is changing the face of teaching, learning and research. As observed by Bloommaert (2005 and 2008) in Odumuh and Ohiare (2016:p27), globalisation produces opportunities as well as constraints, new possibilities as well as new problems. Thus, the dynamic of globalisation, and information and communication technologies on our economic, social, education and cultural life, though offering novel opportunities, pose definite challenges to the dispensation of education in the current times. In language education, teacher educators need to understand that they are entering, or have already entered the biggest language/linguistic revolution ever. Eastment (1999) estimated that there were 1,000 English Language Teaching (ELT) sites devoted to language learning activities, resources, and materials on the internet. In the sixteen years that have

passed since then, the number of (ELT) sites have grown exponentially. The corollary of this is that there is need to help teachers develop the appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, and perspectives to teach English in the light of globalisation. To prepare this new generation of teachers, we need a teacher education system that is not only globally but also technologically compliant.

This paper has highlighted the wide range of knowledge that teachers now need about the affordances of ICT as well as the knowledge they have always needed of content, the curriculum, their students, teaching approaches, classroom management, learners and their characteristics, etc. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in addition to providing many new affordances for learning and enabling different ways of learning that are proving to be beneficial and motivating for students, developments in ICT are making the role of the teachers much more complex.

In addition, teachers' beliefs about the value of ICT for learning are important in their pedagogical reasoning but there is evidence that teachers beliefs and practices do not change automatically as a result of classroom experience (Desforges, 1995:p385-400). The need for teachers' professional development is clear but enabling teachers to adapt their pedagogical reasoning and practices in response to learning opportunities provided by ICT is likely to be a very difficult and complex process.

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