



**MADONNA
UNIVERSITY**

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL**
OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

VOL. 1 , NO 4

2023



International Journal of Education and Arts Vol.1 , NO 4 Nov. 2023

Digitalization of English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The world around us has drastically changed over time and this drastic shift is as a result of innovations in the field of science and technology which has reduced the sizes of the technological tools and increased the speed in which they operate in teaching English. However, due to the insufficient supply of appropriate teaching devices, most English language teachers and students are left to their own devices and the teachers' level of awareness in the use of ICT is generally poor. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the digitalization of English language teaching and learning, its significance is not just in terms of preparing the learners for an uncertain future, but in building their confidence. A descriptive qualitative research method was used and the data for the study were analyzed through interview and close ended questionnaire within the Theory of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Fred Davis in 1989. The population of the study is all the staff and students and the purposively selected sample population was 10 students between the ages of 17-24 years and 8 teachers of English language from Madonna University Nigeria, Anambra State. The result indicated students' confidence on digital technology in helping them

in creating an interesting atmosphere for learning whereas the teachers upheld the use of these digital tools but some challenges become the major obstacles.

Keywords: *English as second language, teaching and learning methods, Digitalization, digital tools and Digital era.*

Introduction

Language is a method of expressing ideas and emotions in the form of signs and symbols which are used to encode and decode the information. According to Hoque (2017), there are many languages spoken today. The first language acquired by a baby is his/her mother tongue which is a language he/she listened to from birth. Any other language learned or acquired is called a second language. However, the achievement of the learning of a second language is greatly dependent on the ability of the learners to use the languages flexibly, sensitively, accurately and appropriately. Obviously, nobody can learn a foreign language properly without immersing himself in its culture, since the two are inextricably linked. This simply implies that for one to learn English language effectively, one has to give off a certain amount of one's personality, culture and self-pride.

The majority of second language teaching and learning takes place in classrooms using various instructional strategies. Thus indicating that the advancement of education has been accompanied by multiple innovations aimed at enhancing its effectiveness, ranging from conventional educational techniques to digital technology-based e-learning. As a result of these developments, there has always been a drive to enhance and simplify access to the educational system through technology. Digital technology has become an inseparable tool used in teaching and learning environment over decades and its gradual development of mankind is an important part of integration to the digital world with the help of teachers who can facilitate learners' learning process. Currently, a number of institutions in Anambra State still face challenges in moving with the global world. Majority of teachers are left with no choice but to use available free online worksheets and tools while the students depend on their intuition by developing supplemental learning platforms which help

them to revise and consolidate their knowledge by browsing the Internet at their pace.

Moreover, digital tools, such as Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, E-Library, Power Point and blogs have become more available and accessible to teachers and students. These have exposed and empowered them to create digitally mediated texts (Paesani, et al. 2015) in an enormous globalized community to a degree that has never happened before. As the Internet has transformed globally, the nature of competence has increasingly become more online than offline (Castek et al. 2007). Han (2008) asserts that computer can promote learning interaction between learners and teachers and the use of mobile devices among students outside classroom is not something new. Therefore, students need more guidance in order to facilitate the development of their language skills and they must be monitored and supported by their teachers to use the powerful tools for learning.

Technology is an ideal tool for English language teaching and learning that supports a learner-centred and functional approach to knowledge (Koua, 2013). Leu et al. (2004) claim that “new technologies generate new literacies” Nowadays, teachers and students broadly use digital and mobile technologies in both formal and informal learning contexts, and this means learning can take place anywhere and anytime (Traxler, 2005). This, however, concurs with the happenings during the Covid-19 pandemic where online education became a vital part of teaching and learning.

Meanwhile, while the availability of digital tools for education is widespread, the use of these tools in the teaching and learning practice, as well as digital competence in general is still uneven among the English language teachers and students. And despite the increasing adoption of technology in education forced by COVID-19 emergency, teachers and students from Madonna University showed heterogeneity with respect to their readiness to use technology in teaching. The purpose of this study is to explore the aid of digital technologies to teachers in second language teaching and to examine the benefits and challenges of using these tools during teaching and learning processes. The paper anchors on two research

questions:

1. How do digital technologies aid the teachers in teaching the second language?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of applying modern technologies during teaching and learning?

However, the significance of this paper geared towards building students' confidence, critical thinking, character as the users of digital technologies and to enable the teachers to know how best to employ computers, other forms of digital technology in language teaching. Hence, the preoccupation of this study is to examine the teachers' and the students' use of digital tools in teaching and learning English language in Madonna University Nigeria.

Review of Relevant Scholarship

Some studies showed that technology significantly improve the learners` language skills. Abbasova (2019) explored the role of digital technology both in language acquisition and teaching using Khazar university in Azerbaijan. He concluded with the importance of training session for teachers who are not aware of digital technology.

Also, Alexandra (2015) worked on the use of digital tools in teaching literature and was of the opinion that lectures can be consulted online while in lecture hall. Furthermore, he focused on innovation of practices of interpretation through project work and also the invention of artifacts with the help of digital tools.

In addition, Jorgen (2017) dwelt on the pedagogical digital competence. He anchored on the knowledge, skills, attitudes and approaches relation to digital teaching on the fact that a lot of challenges are on teaching in providing high-quality teaching.

'Teaching and Learning in Times of Covid-19: Uses of Digital Technologies during School Lockdown' according to Jaun- Ignacio Pozo et al (2017) intended to analyze the activities carried out during the Covid—19 through digital technologies and the conceptions of teaching and learning that they reflect by using Likert-type online questionnaire to measure the frequency of teaching activities. They discovered that activities carried out through ICT during confined schooling were more teacher-centred than student-centred and

hardly promoted the 21st-century skills, that digital technologies should facilitate.

Baytak et al., (2011) carried out the role of technology in language learning. In their article 'Experiencing Technology Integration in Education: Children's Perceptions', they used six children to explore their experiences in using technologies in their education. They disclosed that the reality that changes in technology influences students' experiences with technology

However, the general research findings showed that technology provided the capacity to afford opportunities for supporting a powerful teaching and learning atmospheres (Hermans et al., 2008) and can impact on students' learning (Concannon et al., 2005), motivation building (Mahdizadeh et al., 2008), critical thinking building (Lim et al., 2003), and the autonomy (Claudia et al., 2004) These scholars found out that learners' learning was improved by integrating technology into the classroom and the use of technology increases learners' motivation, social interactions, learning and engagement.

Although research on digital competence in educational context has increased by different scholars, as mentioned above, none has worked to ascertain the students' view on the importance of technology in learning process; and the current study equally focused on a particular department from the same institution which serves as a gap from the previous studies.

Theoretical Framework

The theory suitable for this study is the Theory of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), propounded by Davis, F. D. in 1989. The theory is useful because it describes how digital information resources are utilized by the teachers and students. TAM is one of the most widely applied models of users' acceptance and usage of technology. It suggests that a number of factors become a challenge on how and when they will use it. These factors are lack of training, time, behavioural intentions, individual intentions and organization condition, thus replaces many of TRA's attitude measures with the two technology acceptance measures – ease of use and usefulness.

One of the elements by Davis, that is, the perceived

usefulness (PU) is relevant here because students believed that use of technological tools are crucial as they help in search for information in order to enhance their academic activities than the traditional ways. Suffice it that students can read and search for information faster with the use of technology.

Another element of this theory perceived ease-of-use (PEOU) is equally relevant as it has to do with the ability of the teachers to accept and use electronic device which will ease their usefulness of digital information resources and teaching becomes easier and interesting as well as influences students' academic activities in their life. That is to say, efforts to search information and teach in a traditional way will automatically reduce with the use of digital tools. The researcher adopted this theory because of its relevance to the challenges of using digital tools in teaching and learning the second language.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose the descriptive qualitative design as it endeavours to collect and describe the data obtained from respondents' perceptions that are involved. This research design is suitable for this study because it narrows its focus on ICT integration and its relatedness to second language teaching and learning.

Population of the Study

In this research, the population includes all the staff and students of Madonna University Nigeria from the department of English language.

Sample Method

The sample method adopted in this study is random sampling. Using this method, ten students were randomly selected between the ages of 17-24 years from 200 to 400 levels. They consist of 5 females and 5 males.

The selected teachers involved were separated into two age groups between “25–40” and “40–55”. It was assumed according to Pew Report (2013) that older people might be reluctant in making an effective use of digital gadgets in classroom settings. However, eight

teachers of academic staff of Department of English at Madonna University gave their consent to take part in this study. Five of them were interviewed within the classroom settings at the department and the other three were interviewed via WhatsApp. Meanwhile, the teachers are different depending on their age and years of experience, most of them are females (only two males) and one of them is a foreigner which probably makes him inclined with the use of technologies.

Data Collection

In this study, the research instrument used in data collection was a structured close-ended questionnaire which was used in collecting students' opinion on the use of digital tools in learning process and an interview as a meaning-oriented method which was chosen to analyse teachers' responses to the research questions under investigation.

Table 1. Participants

Interview question1: How do digital tools aid in teaching the second language?

This first research question was created to find out the supportive side of technologies in terms of second language teaching. The interviews have revealed that there is a real connection

Teachers	Gender	Age	Place of work	Experience	Taught courses
P1	Female	35	Madonna university	9years	Phonetics and Phonology
P2	Female	40	Madonna university	1and half yr	ESL; p. Grammar
P3	Female	55	Madonna university	8years	Basic Grammar; Oral translation
P4	Male	46	Madonna university Bamenda university Cameroon	7years	ESL Spoken English Translational studies

P5	Female	43	Madonna university	9years	Advanced Syntax
P6	Female	44	Madonna university	3years	ESP, Linguistics
P7	Male	38	Madonna university	2years	Advanced EPC
P8	Female	40	Madonna university	5years	Applied Linguistics

between the second language teaching and the use of digital technologies. All the teachers emphasized its huge advantageous support to both teachers and students and saw it as a demand of modern systems. However, each of them has a personal attitude towards the use of these technologies depending on variables such as their age group, experience and the subjects they teach.

P1: 35 years old

P1 being a phonetics and phonology lecturer, does not accept the classes without relevant digital amenities; otherwise, she believes that the class would be very boring for students especially when they are in the English laboratory. She mainly focuses on sound effects coming out of the devices provided for the pronunciation of English words.

“We can use the devices and instructors in the English lab to teach and learn to enable the students imitate the owners of the language correctly in the pronunciation unlike when we do it theoretically. Also, their voices should be recorded and then make them listen to their own pronunciation and correct it by showing the right one. She concludes that the students' repetition along the instructor will make learning to be more impactful”.

P2: 40 years old

P2 as other interviewed teachers uses digital technologies in her classes based on what topic she plans to represent. She gives credit to the strength of “visual teaching” and “visual memory” and believes that the use of digital devices will be an edge in making teaching English as the second language more effective. In this regard, applications of video presentations are of great importance in order to make students memorize unknown topics more easily:

“The main advantage is that teaching becomes more interesting because students will have a good visual memory and it is equally good to apply the knowledge you have learnt into practice”.

P3: 55 years old

P3 upholds digital gadgets in each class as the subject she teaches requires technological involvement. This participant viewed her point from Oral Translation perspective and is of the opinion that listening activities and sound practices done through computer and speakers will be of great importance in classroom teaching.

“During my time of study, there was nothing like modern technologies for practices to enable us practice oral translations. Presently, because we are in a digital age, everyone aspires to go digital and students are not exception. These technologies made students have more access to the internet and other forms of technologies which enable them do more practices than previous generation”.

P4: 46 years old

In comparison with other participants, P4 is inclined to make use of technologies as an effective tool for teaching. He is a part-time lecturer at Madonna University Nigeria in the Department of English but a full time lecturer in the University of Bamenda Cameroon. According to him, as he teaches spoken English in Madonna University, he utilizes computers frequently to enable students involve in listening and speaking activities by means of videos and audio CDs. PowerPoint presentations according to him are equally useful in explaining new topics with visual charts and brief verbal explanations.

“Young people these days are so keen on technologies, thus they enlarged interest in new methods of learning by using modern technologies”.

P5: 43 years old

The participant explained the important aspect of using modern technologies in teaching the second language with key

purposes within classes:

“First, they help me teach the lessons, secondly, the students love gadgets and they are interested in any teaching that involves technology which reduces boredom in classroom. So, when I use modern technology, they are more interested to have received knowledge in a platform they love and this will make them more involved in our lessons”.

Significantly, P5 places a reliance on researching, listening and presenting practices based upon “E-Library and understanding”. Accessibility is one of the most advantageous sides for her as she can be versatile with the latest materials or teaching methodology via the Internet sources.

“I always advice my students to be very happy and up and doing because whatever they watch and listen now circulate very fast as people all over the world can as well find and use the same materials”.

P6: 44 years old

P6 demonstrated an unusual correlation compared to the other teachers and she does not use any digital gadget during the teaching process.

“I only rely on myself, my notes and on direct communication with the students. Not that I don't fancy using digital tools in teaching, but I feel quite comfortable teaching by using my voice”.

Notwithstanding, she is convinced that making use of technological tools helps teachers in doing accurate, timely and detailed research in the area of the second language with authentic materials and linguistic context they may want students to be exposed to. Also, she agrees that it is a “digital era” and teachers should build bridge to young students' interests as they are good at acquiring lingual aspects much better in this respect.

“We can also use them to create online learning, you know, in a form of E-Library. I don't use it, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't do it, it probably should be done because it makes learning easier, universalized and decentralised”.

Even as a non-user of these technologies, she shows more positive

attitude.

P7: 38 years old

The P7 is of the opinion that being in the digital world makes our world easier and communicative. He is one among the three that were interviewed through WhatsApp voice note and so he is versatile with the technologies and believes that the tools are very effective in second language teaching and learning which requires skills to operate.

“Being a technological apparatus requires skills in order to operate and equally advantageous for any teacher who can create these skills”

He also affirms that *“Teaching goes with planning”*. To him, online makes teachers to plan ahead with current and recent materials which facilitate personal learning for the teacher. In as much as teachers are trained to be perfect in teaching, yet, imperfection is always evident when it comes to giving errors; anyone can be a victim of that.

“Online assists the teachers in correcting errors, in form of auto correction gadgets, which can effectively influence and teach the teacher more”.

P8: 40years old

The participant 8 eulogizes the importance of technology in teaching and learning. Since she was absent during the period of the interview; *“the availability of whatsapp has made it easy for me to participate which shows the important part of technology in learning and teaching in and outside the classroom”*.

Like other participants, P8 uses digital technologies in teaching and believes that it improves her lessons and helps her in assessing the students' capacity. In fact, these digital gadgets according to her make her work easier and faster and *“makes it more scientific”*.

Discussion of the interview results

It is evident from the results that language teaching and the

use of digital technologies are interrelated and can be considered as an inseparable part of language learning process. All the participants of the current study stressed the importance of the digital facilities for supporting both teachers and students in ESL classes., since teachers of the new generation have grown up with digital technology and it is woven into their lives.

Interview question 2: What are the benefits and challenges of using modern technologies in teaching?

All the participants that took part in this study stress the advantages and challenges involved in the use of digital tools in teaching. Despite the fact that P6 does not use electronic devices in her classes, she still believes in its positive impact on the learning process. According to the findings, the advantage is easy accessibility of the online dictionaries, creates room for research sharing, makes learning easy, assist in making research better, easier, timely and highly productive; and exposing both the teachers and students to diverse methods and processes of acquiring knowledge. However, P4 said that the advantages weigh more than the disadvantages. Meanwhile, the pitfalls are access constraint, epileptic nature of the network, inadequate training and insufficient knowledge of the digital tools, non-availability of some of the needed tools in the country and lack of constant power. In all, these modern technologies may impede learning by destroying the aim for which they were meant.

Analysis of the Close Ended Questionnaire

In this second part of the study, ten (10) copies of close ended questionnaires were mapped out for the 10 students from the department of English. Percentages from the collected data were tabulated and analysed descriptively.

Meanwhile, there are abbreviations used in the tables which are:

SA: Strongly agree, A: Agree, N: Neutral, SD: Strongly disagree, D: Disagree

Disagree

S/N	ITEM S	SA	A	N	SD	D	AGE
1	Using digital tools in second language learning is better than traditional way of learning	60%	30%	60%	10%	0%	
2	Digital tools make English learning boring	0%	10%	10%	60%	20%	
3	It leads to easy understanding of lectures	40%	10%	50%	0%	0%	

The above sample indicates that 60 % of students strongly agree, 30% of them agree, 10% were neutral, and 0% of them were strongly disagree that technological method of learning is better than traditional method. The next, 0% of students strongly agree, 10% of them agree, 10% were neutral, 60% of them were strongly disagree and 20% disagree that digital technology makes learning boring. The last, 40% of students strongly agree, 10% of them agree, 50% were neutral, 0% of them were strongly disagree that digital tools facilitate easy understanding of lectures.

Conclusions

Modern technology and second language teaching are much of a muchness for a long time contributing to English language classes as teaching facilities. However, if we are to be familiar with the way computers and information technologies think and function, if we want to feel at ease with them, and use them in an optimal way, if we want to learn and get ahead in our lives and careers, we need to be literate/ competent. Thus, a teacher with the knowledge of digital tools can be of help to students in their journey towards achieving expected learning outcomes.

With this in mind, the researcher recommends that teachers should be drilled actively in professional development such as, conferences, seminars, workshop, in order to be familiar with the evolution of the new technology and if digital technology is utilized properly in ESL classes, without being overused, the language learners can make full use in developing their overall language skills.

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