Language Communication in the 21st Century; Integrating ICT Based Language Teaching in Nigeria, Prospects and Challenges: Alliance Française De Jos and Achievers University Owo.

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Abstract

This paper seeks to evaluate the important role ICT has played in the teaching and learning of French language in Alliance Française de Jos and Achievers University Owo. It points out that language teaching has evolved and gained tremendous growth thanks to recent developments over the years through the use of ICT based language teaching technologies. It posits that while this growth is particularly important and commendable, there have been great challenges in the areas of adaptation, adoption and implementation based on sociocultural and economic factors. Some of these economic factors range from poor power supply to erratic internet connections etc. It also calls on government to intensify efforts in providing basic teaching and social amenities in schools for better teaching and learning environments.

Keywords: ICT, Language teaching, Foreign language, French, Integration, Challenges, Barriers.

1.0 Introduction

It is not entirely news to say that the use of ICT in the educational sector is a relatively new development and it has been the attention of researchers of education's focus of attention for two decades running. Educators and researchers have been examining the challenges involved in the use of ICT while thinking of new ways and strategies of integrating ICT into the various curricula in use Adeleke (2011), known as a medium rather than a method as seen with Salehi and Salehi (2012) in which a variety of methods and approaches are seen together Garret (1991). It is however important to note that there are challenges and barriers posed for the teachers preventing them from the proper use of ICT in

the classroom and the development of supporting materials through the use of ICT. Moreover, shortage of class time has been another very important discouraging factor for the teachers in the integration of ICT into the curriculum Olumuyiwa and Elusakin (2012). The purpose of this study is to examine the importance, prospects and challenges of integrating ICT based language teaching in the classroom at Alliance française de Jos, Plateau State and Achievers University, Owo Ondo State.

It is to be noted that insufficient technical supports at the schools, little or no access to Internet and ICT resources and materials prevent teachers from using ICT in the classroom. It was discovered that poor/epileptic power supply

among others are major factors and or challenges to the effective use of ICT based language teaching.

1.1 What is ICT?

ICT means Information and Communication Technology. Kent sees, ICT in the education milieu refers to digital materials and platforms such as computers, communications facilities, materials and features which are used variously to support the teaching and learning processes and a range of other activities in education [QCA schemes of work for ICT in Kent country council, 2004]. Because of its various interactive and dynamic natures, ICT has been said to have the stamina to meet the needs of the individual student because it provides opportunities used in directing their learning and the pursuit of information. According to Ammanni and Aparanjani (2016), through the usage of ICT platforms and materials, students can learn any subject especially languages and with particular reference, French with ease. In the context of the global ICT growth and exchange the role which ICT and its platforms play has become inevitable in the 21st century.

2.0 ICT Based Language Teaching Materials

There is an inexhaustible list of ICT based language teaching materials available at the beck and call of all language teachers. These include but not limited to:

2.1 Computer Assisted Language Learning

Computer Assisted Language Learning CALL is an ever increasing and changing discipline. It is an approach to the teaching and learning of foreign or second languages in which a computer, computer-based resources and information technology are used to present, reinforce and assess materials to be learned.

2.2 The internet

The internet has always offered and still offers one of the best ways of learning language other than immersion in a French speaking milieu. The relationship students have developed and are still developing with the internet is becoming increasingly much more noticeable than with prints and books as they continue to share information on the net.

2.3 Mobile Digital Devices

The use of Mobile and digital devices like laptops, iPods, tablets, smart phones have all but made French language learning a lot easier and fun than it used to be. Presently, there are so many applications that could be downloaded on these devices in the App or play store for Android and Apple users. So many of these Apps are free to use while others are pay licensed and one has to pay to have them installed. Whichever one gets to use, the point is that they have made French language learning easier.

2.4 Overhead Projectors/Slides

Often abbreviated to OHP, it is used to project a small information or image to a large audience thereby making it livelier and easily interactive. It is used in language teaching in other to help make ideas more explicit. Teachers need some visual aids in the form of OHP to supplement the whiteboard.

2.5 Television sets

It is generally believed that one can easily forget what he hears but what one sees may most likely not be easily forgotten Abbah (2016). As such, the use of television sets in French language learning makes learning a fun-filled one. Television gives user the experience of a beautiful real world in the classroom Emaish (2016). Here teaching is made a very high and active process. Television is now seen and consider as a companion, entertainer and instructor.

2.6 Mobile phones

Mobile phones especially android and Apple enabled phones have become essential and integral parts of French language learning in our ever evolving world of today. Smart Teachers are taking advantage of this trend to enhance their

learners' competence and ability while the students are advancing in the learning at the comfort of their leisure time.

2.7 Radio/Video players

Radio and Video players are cross-platform multimedia player and framework that play most multimedia files, and various streaming protocols. Language lessons could be prerecorded and played in the classroom for the benefits of learners. These could be used as a form of language interactive lessons where learners are made to repeat the sounds they hear.

3.0   Benefits

ICT has become of immense help in virtually all areas of teaching and learning (Akintunde and Angulu 2015). In the field of language learning and language education, there is now so much emphasis on online learning laced with peace for all involved, which has been seen as the great liberator who has come to free both teachers and students. It helps them to accomplish learning in varying new and exciting ways by helping to search, source and retrieve information from the Internet on their behalf in no just a little time (Schrum, 2000). The benefits of an ICT based language teaching/learning cannot be overemphasized. There are several benefits to it and its beneficiaries include the Teachers, Learners, Institutions, and Governments across all levels Ayelaagbe and Bello (2009). These benefits include: Distant leaning, Self-paced learning, continuous/non-stop learning Chapelle (2001), just to mention but a few. We will examine some of these benefits and how they apply to our Institutions of learning.

3.1 Distant Learning

The lockdown experience in Nigeria and other parts of the world due to the outbreak of the Novel Corona virus otherwise known as Covid-19 and what institutions did with ICT while it lasted is a perfect example of what an ICT based language communication teaching can do. AF Jos continued to dispense classes, at no extra charge to its teaming students while still on lockdown through WhatsApp, Zoom and Google

Meet. While none of these can substitute the one-on-one language learning and interactions, it will sure help in ensuring that students' and learners' interest in the language do not wane. It also ensures that the little that may have been learned does not disappear since the spoken environment is not available Eboh-Nzekwue,. Nchekwube, Odirichi and Chukwuyem (2021). Results and feedbacks from students and teachers all show that it has been very effective as the students keep showing an increased zeal during the classes through intensive participatory classes.

Nigeria could think in the direction of ICT for our teaming population since the end to this pandemic is not in sight. Primary, secondary and tertiary school students' energy can be harnessed into something worthwhile as the idleness could lead to something mischievous.

3.2 Self-paced Independent Learning

It is noteworthy that those involved in ICT based language learning have to their credit, time to work at their own pace. This is so because the learners do not necessarily have to close their offices and or work places to go to a language school to attend classes. They can attend classes while in the car, at home, the market place and or the office. This makes learning a fun filled experience as learners can multi task while learning.

3.3 Continuous/Nonstop Learning

Alliance française de Jos is not a conventional school and as such, students or learners do not have to be in school all through the year. A learner can attend one session of the year and leave due to pressing personal or official issues. The idea of continuity is that learners do not have to leave or defer their classes to further sessions and continue later on. In the ICT based language teaching, learners can leave the environment where the school is located and travel out of the country or even the continent while still learning.

Other benefits include:

-   The needed and searched information is obtained within a fraction of time.

- Learners and users tend to become much more innovative in self-paced e-learning.
- Information provided by ICT helps make student more competitive in todays' ever evolving digital world.
- Teachers and learners can work current and authentic sources.

The benefits of an ICT based language teaching/learning are enormous as can be seen from the above. However, everything that has benefits has its challenges and we will take a look at such challenges.

4.0 Challenges

It is said that every good thing in life has its own challenges Aremu (2011). Integrating an ICT based language teaching/learning has its numerous challenges especially in this part of the world called Nigeria. These challenges are but not limited to: Non availability of ICT based language teaching materials and resources incessant power outage/failure, poor knowledge of ICT on Teachers/Students, poor internet connectivity.

Moses Adedayo Aremu while citing the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2000); had earlier on outlined some of the challenges for the use of ICT based langue learning. According him, very poor power supplies, nonfunctional GSM lines, erratic and unstable internet facilities etc. are very expensive, unreliable or unavailable when needed. Video recorders as well as other ICT materials are locked in inaccessible stores due to poor knowledge of their uses on the part of teachers while the few with reliable ICT knowledge end up abandoning their teaching jobs for what are perceived to more lucrative job offers as teaching as is not an attractive profession especially in Nigeria. Also, lack or poor maintenance culture which has been the bane of the Nigerian society adversely affects the existing ICT gadgets where they are provided for while schools hardly have any language labs to start with and where there are, they are largely overcrowded thereby standing as barriers to the adequate use of ICT in Schools.

We will briefly take a look at these challenges and how they affect ICT based language teaching/learning.

4.1 Non-Availability of ICT Based Materials and Resources

There is poor availability of ICT based language materials in the schools under review especially Achievers University. Unlike conventional institutions of learning, Alliance française de Jos is blessed to have these materials readily available for the use of its teachers who include them in their teaching plans on a daily basis. The unavailability of these materials will greatly hamper French language teaching/learning as several methods which would help learners and teachers evolve will be missing. Despite the huge resources being put into use, (Adejo, 2021) posits that only 37.5% of ICT based facilities that are available and functioning in NFLV's library. This will definitely impede on the research work of staff and students in the institution

4.2 Power Outage

This is a major setback in the Nigerian educational and economic landscape. Incessant power outage could hamper the use of certain technology-based materials such as Audio and audio-visual materials: Desktop computers, Radios, Video players, TVs, overhead projectors and slides, telephones etc. these materials need to be powered in other to have them used.

4.3 Poor Knowledge of ICT on Teachers/Students

A teacher who lacks basic ICT knowledge will most definitely not be able to make use of same to teach. This has made it imperative for all teachers to have knowledge of ICT so as to be able to effectively handle the language class of the 21st Century. This can be done through self-improvement courses done online and offline. Some these trainings are free.

4.4 Poor Internet Connectivity

Nigeria has had to grapple with poor internet facilities since the inception of internet in Nigeria. It is considered to be an exclusive reserve of the rich and mighty and even at that, one has to be at certain locations to be able to access this facility and at a cutthroat price. According Guardian online; "Only 12.1 per cent of the Nigerian population currently enjoys Internet services (Meaningful Connectivity) quality in the country. This is according to an in-depth research by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI)'' while Thisdaylive.com reports that one of the plagues of poor internet in Nigeria has been traced to the issues of anti-competition practices in the industry. The NCC also lists what could be termed hydra-headed inadequate spectrum, high price of bandwidth, high cost of Right of Way, and lack of good corporate governance practice by the companies as Nigeria is rated among the countries of the world with the poorest internet connectivity at 151 out of 181 rated countries. With this status, engaging in online classes becomes a herculean task as there are frequent disruptions at various intervals from Teachers or students end.

5.0   Recommendations:

This paper seeks to recommend some interesting ways some of these challenges could be overcome in Nigeria.

5.1 Teachers' Training and Retraining

In the light of the ongoing, it is recommended that teachers should be involved in self-upgrade through personal development and familiarize themselves with the use and application of ICT materials and facilities in the acquisition and dispensing of language education. To this end, the French embassy in Nigeria, recently organized an online training for members of UFTAN (University French Teachers Association of Nigeria) on the use of ICT in French language teaching and learning. This training it is hoped, will deepen and brooding the knowledge horizons of participants in this wise.

The commitment and enthusiasm to the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria through the diligent, continuous and effective use of ICT should be emphasized and made of utmost importance not only to those in charge of language education curriculum planning and policy making but also the teachers involved with teaching and the learners of French language. In order to ensure the rapid integration of ICT into language teaching/learning processes, the following could be considered and put in place:

5.2 Upgraded Internet Facility

The challenges posed by poor internet facility in Nigeria are enormous and cannot be overemphasized. Internet service providers can see this as a way of corporate social responsibility in aiding educational development by partnering with institutions of learning in ensuring adequate provision of affordable regular and affordable internet services. This will go a long way in enhancing ICT based French language teaching and learning and will definitely benefit other subjects of learning.

5.3 Sustained Power Supply

Achievers University has taken the bull by the horn in providing a dedicated power supply line to its teaming staff and students. This project is expected to cost well over a 100 million naira. For a privately owned institution without funding from any quarter, this is quite commendable and should be applauded. Basically, it is the government's responsibility in providing basic social amenities to its citizens however, when this is lacking, public and private spirited efforts can be harnessed for self-help supports.

5.4 Use of Solar Powered Facilities

The use of solar powered facilities can be encouraged. Alliance française de Jos is already tapping into this as all its buildings are solar activated. These facilities could be restricted to the classrooms to power the teaching materials needed for class. This way, costs cans be brought down to its minimum especially for Institutions like Achievers University with bigger facilities.

This also means that the governments input in ensuring that proliferation is contained and quality is assured.

6.0   Conclusion

The benefits of an ICT based language teaching/learning cannot be overemphasized as it has multiplying effects as can be seen from the ongoing. However, it is believed that this can only be effective when the supply of electricity is constant/regular. If the teaching/learning of computer-based courses in schools is implemented, learners and teachers will also help to it more serious. When the government engages in the encouragement of Research and Development Centers on ICT, the provision of computers in schools for learners and laptops for

teachers of French language, proper recruitment of adequate and competent instructors, regular computer training and re-training for French language teachers, provision of internet facilities in schools, there shall be great improvement on the part of the French language educators to appreciate government's efforts by working harder to ensure positive results. It is also advised that Government should develop policies and programmes that help in enhancing the national development of ICT in schools and the country as a whole. These policies should not be centered on the urban centers but should have a national spread into the rural areas to give it a national spread.

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