THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: A BLINDSPOT

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Abstract
In today's world, the role of language is increasingly important. Language teaching plays a vital role in the educational landscape of Nigeria. However, despite its significance, language teaching in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, leading to a blind spot in the system. Therefore, this paper aims to shed light on the potentials of technology in transforming language education in Nigeria. Integrating technology into language education can address many of the challenges faced in Nigeria. Technology offers students interactive and engaging resources, such as language learning apps, online platforms, and multimedia content, which can make language learning more enjoyable and effective. The integration of technology in language teaching holds immense potential for Nigeria. By leveraging technology, one can overcome the current blind spots in language education and create a more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning experience for students. It was however recommended that teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively integrate technology into language teaching. To ensure equitable access to technology-enhanced language education, efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide by providing access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital resources for all students.

Keywords: Technology, Language teaching and learning, Blind spots in language teaching, Digital evolution, Artificial intelligence.

Introduction

In today's world, the role of language is increasingly important. This system of communication has great potentials to enable human beings to exchange ideas and express desire (Babalola & Ayodele, 2022).Language teaching plays a vital role in the educational landscape of Nigeria. With over 500 indigenous languages spoken across the country, including, English, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa, language education not only fosters effective communication but also preserves cultural heritage and promotes social cohesion. Language education in Nigeria is not just about learning how to speak and write languages; it is about preserving cultural heritage and fostering national identity. Language is intricately linked to a community's history, values, and traditions, and by promoting language education, Nigeria can celebrate its rich diversity while promoting unity among its citizens.

However, despite its significance, language teaching in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, leading to a blindspot in the system. This blindspot has hindered the development and implementation of effective language teaching strategies that harness the power and potential of technology.

This paper explores the role that technology can play in addressing these challenges and enhancing language teaching practices in Nigeria. By examining the challenges in teaching language, exploring the roles of technology in language teaching, as well as the challenges in integrating technology in language teaching, and providing strategies for effective integration, this paper aims to shed light on the potential of technology in

transforming language education in Nigeria.

Current Challenges in Teaching Language in Nigeria

Despite the importance of language, there are several challenges and blindspots that hinder effective instruction. Inadequate resources and infrastructure, a shortage of qualified language instructors, and a lack of student engagement and motivation are some of the major issues that need to be addressed to improve language education in Nigeria.

It appears that some schools in Nigeria lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to support effective language teaching. Limited access to textbooks, audiovisual aids, and language labs hampers students' ability to practice and apply their language skills, hindering their overall language proficiency.

The shortage of qualified language instructors is also a significant challenge in Nigeria. It appears that most schools struggle to find teachers with the necessary expertise to teach various languages effectively. This shortage not only affects the quality of instruction but also limits the range of languages that can be taught.

Student engagement and motivation are crucial for successful language learning. However, traditional teaching methods often fail to capture students' interest and enthusiasm. It appears that some students seem to be bored with the traditional face-to-face classroom instruction. This traditional method of teaching appeared to have become outdated as teachers seem to provide the same repetitive lecture without considering the individual differences of the students (Ayodele, 2023).

Apata (2023) opined that the traditional methods of language learning, which rely on classroom instruction and textbooks, have proven to be inadequate in providing students with the necessary skills to communicate effectively in international languages. This is because traditional language learning methods have certain shortcomings.

Firstly, they often prioritize grammar rules and vocabulary memorization over practical application and conversational skills, hindering learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Additionally, these methods do not provide sufficient exposure to the cultural aspects of the language, which are crucial for understanding cultural nuances and enhancing communication.

Ayodele (2023) was of the opinion that the traditional teaching method appeared to be less interactive; students are more or less passive learners; teachers see themselves as know it all and the students get distracted easily. It appeared that traditional classroom instruction uses a one size fits all approach which does not provide the students with a personalized learning experience, observation also revealed that students follow the same pattern and learning style regardless of their interest which often times makes the class boring and less interactive.

Without active participation and a stimulating learning environment, students may struggle to develop their language skills effectively. Learners may also face limited personalized feedback and interaction opportunities, both in classroom settings and self-study approaches, impeding their progress. To address these issues, modern language learning approaches adopt technology with its interactive online platforms, mobile applications, and adaptive learning systems.

Technology

Technology refers to the collection of tools, techniques, systems, and processes used by humans to accomplish tasks, solve problems, and achieve specific goals. It encompasses a wide range of artifacts, knowledge, and methods that have been developed and refined over time to enhance human capabilities and improve efficiency in various aspects of life. Technology can be tangible, like physical devices or machinery, as well as intangible, such as software, algorithms, and scientific principles applied to practical purposes. Altun and Ahmad (2021) defined technology as a learning task or instructional objective using technical processes, methods, or knowledge within the context of this study.

Importance of Technology

Technology is often created to address specific problems or challenges. It can simplify complex tasks, automate processes, or enhance

existing capabilities. Technology is continually evolving as new ideas, discoveries, and inventions emerge. Innovation drives the development of new technologies and the improvement of existing ones.

Technology is also practical and is designed to be used for real-world purposes. It aims to make tasks easier, more efficient, and more effective. Technology can be adapted and applied to a wide range of fields and industries. It often has multiple applications beyond its original intended use.

Many technologies are interconnected or interdependent. For example, advances in computer technology can enhance communication, transportation, healthcare, and countless other sectors. Technology also evolves over time in response to changing needs, demands, and opportunities. This evolution can be driven by scientific discoveries, economic factors, or societal trends. As well as it encompasses a broad spectrum, including information technology (computers, software), biotechnology (genetic engineering, medical devices), communication technology (telecommunications, the internet), and industrial technology (machinery, manufacturing processes), among others.

It also raises ethical and moral questions, as it can have both positive and negative impacts on society. Ethical considerations include issues related to privacy, security, environmental impact, and social equity.

Technology is created and used by humans, and its design should consider human needs, capabilities, and usability. Human-computer interaction and user experience design play crucial roles in technology development. Technology also has a profound influence on society, affecting the economy, culture, education, healthcare, and many other aspects of daily life. Its impact can be transformative and far-reaching.

The Role of Technology in Language Teaching

The role of technology in the teaching of language has evolved significantly over the years, transforming the way languages are learned, practiced, and mastered. Technology has introduced new opportunities and tools that enhance language education in various ways.

Access to learning resources: Technology gives a wide access to learning resources. The internet provides a vast array of resources such as online dictionaries, language learning platforms, interactive exercises, grammar guides, and authentic materials like news articles, podcasts, and videos in the target language. This facilitates self-directed learning and exposes learners to real-world language usage. Altun and Ahmad (2021) stated that technology provides hundreds of resources in real time to assist students. Students can use simplified dictionaries, make flashcards, and explore the internet in the language they are learning.

Online Language Learning Platforms: Dedicated language learning platforms and apps offer structured lessons, adaptive exercises, and progress tracking. These platforms often employ gamification and spaced repetition techniques to make learning engaging and effective. Examples include Duolingo, Babbel, Rosetta Stone, and Memrise. Apata (2023) also identified platforms such as; HelloTalk, Pimsleur, Lingodeer, Busuu, Tandem, Anki and Lingvist as platforms designed for learning and acquiring language.

Virtual Classrooms: Technology enables virtual classrooms where learners and instructors from different parts of the world can connect in real time for interactive language lessons. Video conferencing tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet have made it easier to facilitate remote language learning. Ayodele (2023) identified Google classroom as a platform that makes it easy for teachers to monitor students' learning activities without being bound by time limits or class hours.

Language Learning Apps: Mobile apps bring language learning to users' fingertips, allowing them to practice anytime and anywhere. These apps often include features like flashcards, quizzes, pronunciation practice, and language exchange platforms.

Language Learning Games: Gamified

learning experiences engage learners and make the process more enjoyable. Language learning games can help reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and cultural understanding in a playful manner.

Speech Recognition and Pronunciation Tools: Many language learning apps and software include speech recognition technology that helps learners improve their pronunciation by providing feedback on their spoken language.

Language Learning Communities: Online forums, social media groups, and language exchange platforms connect learners with native speakers and other learners, enabling them to practice conversation, receive feedback, and learn from peers.

Machine Translation Tools: While not a substitute for learning a language, machine translation tools like Google Translate can be helpful for quick translations and comprehension checks. However, learners should be cautious about relying solely on these tools for language acquisition.

Content Creation and Collaboration: Technology allows learners to create their own content in the target language, such as writing essays, making videos, or recording audio. Collaboration tools enable group projects and interactions that promote language use in real-world contexts.

Cultural Exposure: Online media and streaming platforms provide access to authentic content in the target language, including movies, TV shows, music, and news. This exposure enhances cultural understanding and language immersion.

Adaptive Learning: Some advanced language learning platforms use data-driven approaches to tailor lessons and exercises based on individual learners' strengths, weaknesses, and progress.

Integrating technology into language education can address many of the challenges faced in Nigeria. Technology offers students interactive and engaging resources, such as language learning apps, online platforms, and multimedia content, which can make language learning more enjoyable and effective.Some of these resources are mobile apps, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Online language learning platforms, Virtual reality (VR), Language Learning Management Systems (LLMS), etc. some of which can easily be accessed on mobile phones which are connected to the internet. This makes them to be able to learn and acquire any language at their own paces and at their own convenience. It also provides access to authentic language materials and allows for personalized learning experiences. Ayodele (2022) identified Flipped classroom as one of the resources used for language learning, Flipped classroom encourages permanent learning, it accommodates as many participants as possible, no class limit. It makes learning to be fun and encouraging.

The use of technology can enhance language acquisition and proficiency through its immersive and interactive nature. Language learning apps, videoconferencing tools, and online language exchange platforms enable students to practice language skills with native speakers and engage in real-life conversations. Additionally, technology allows for instant feedback, adaptive learning, and individualized instruction, catering to students' unique needs and learning styles.

Also, technology has made language learning more accessible by providing learners with opportunities to engage in language learning activities outside the classroom. According to Stockwell (2012), technology has made it possible for learners to access language learning resources and tools outside the classroom, such as language learning apps, podcasts, and online language courses. This has allowed learners to continue their language learning outside the classroom, at their own pace and convenience. Similarly, it has provided learners with access to a diverse range of language learning resources and tools.

Technology can also provide learners with access to authentic materials in the target language, such as movies, TV shows, music, and news articles. This can help learners to immerse themselves in the target language and culture. It

can also, be used to provide learners with personalized instruction that is tailored towards their individual needs and learning styles. This can help learners to progress at their own pace and to focus on the areas where they need help the most. In addition, technology can be used to facilitate communication with native speakers of the target language. This can help learners to practice their speaking and listening skills and to get feedback on their progress. Similarly, technology can be used to provide learners with motivation to continue learning, through its interactive nature. According to Kim and Kwon (2012), technology can increase learners' motivation by providing them with more autonomy and control over their learning and by providing them with engaging and interactive language learning activities. Students are motivated more while they are working on computers and use modern devices than they are working with textbooks (Cutter, 2015).

Technology also shapes how people use language in particular instances, not as an autonomous, deterministic force, but in interaction with a range of factors including individual volition, social conventions, situational context, and material constraints (Kern, 2015). Since one of language teachers' key tasks is to help their students understand how linguistic and cultural norms operate, it is important for teachers to address how language is used across different material mediums and technologies.

Significantly, technology has been found to be very beneficial to the educational well-being of both students and their teachers in the actualization of the teaching-learning goals, both within the classroom and outside of the classroom. Technology has the potential to overcome language learning barriers, such as geographical distance, limited access to language learning resources, and time constraints.

Studies on the Use of Technology in the teaching of language in Nigeria

In a study conducted by Iloene, Iloene, Mbah, and Mbah (2013) to investigate how Igbo language teachers in Nigeria utilize technology for teaching the Igbo language, the findings revealed that there are accessible and available new technologies that Igbo language teachers can utilize, and most of them demonstrate competence in using these technologies. The teachers displayed a positive attitude towards incorporating computers and other technological tools in their Igbo language instruction. However, the study also identified certain challenges that hinder the widespread use of new technologies in Igbo teaching, such as the absence of Igbo-specific application software. The study concluded by emphasising the need for interventions to enhance the integration of new technologies in Igbo language teaching, thus expanding the potential of the Igbo language as a medium for incorporating innovative technologies in language instruction.

Similarly, Onyenweaku and Edem (2017), conducted a qualitative study to examine the utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching English language in Nigerian educational institutions. The study identified various challenges that hindered the integration of technological tools by English language teachers. These challenges included insufficient funding, inadequate ICT facilities, lack of competence among some teachers, and inconsistent power supply, as well as ineffective implementation of ICT policies by relevant authorities. Based on their findings, the researchers recommended several measures. First, there should be adequate funding for education and the provision of sufficient ICT facilities in all schools across the country, regardless of the educational level. Additionally, they suggested the implementation of free and compulsory training programmes to equip English language teachers with the necessary skills in utilizing ICT for teaching purposes. These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and improve the application of ICT in English language instruction.

In a study conducted by Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo, and Delić (2021) on the utilization of technology and teacher support in English language learning as a foreign language (EFL) among high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results indicated that the students had a positive experience with technology-based language learning (TBL), and

teachers played a crucial role in facilitating technology-based foreign language learning. The study found no significant gender and EFL GPA differences, but it did observe significant differences among different grade levels regarding teacher support. Additionally, the study revealed no significant differences in technology use based on gender and grade level, but it did find significant differences based on students' EFL GPA. These findings can be valuable for teachers seeking to effectively integrate digital technologies into foreign language instruction at the high school level. The researchers recommended raising teachers' awareness of the support required to help students enhance their self-directed use of technology, particularly beyond the confines of the official school environment. The education system should adapt to these advancements and implement necessary systemic reforms.

In another research by Vellanki and Bandu (2021) onstudents' engagement online with Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic effected a sudden shift to online teaching, prompting teachers to implement many uncommon or even unusual teaching techniques in this unforeseen context. The study revealed that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasis on real-life language through meaningful tasks; and it is student-centred. The study also outlined with examples how technology-mediated tasks could be deployed to encourage learners to use language in productive ways. Finally, the authors discuss some of the anticipated challenges concerning the application of TBLT in online teaching and learning contexts.

While examining undergraduate students' exploration of Instagram and TikTok in learning language skills and content in Ado-Ekiti, Jimola (2023) investigated undergraduate students' knowledge of and competence in using Instagram and TikTok as learning spaces for learning language skills and content. The study also examined the influence of age and gender on undergraduate students' competence to use Instagram and TikTok to learn language skills and content. Two major language departments in a university in Nigeria were involved in the study. Three hundred and fifty-two students constituted the sample for the study; 110 from Linguistics/Languages Department and 242 from English and Literary studies. Data were collected using a close ended-self-constructed questionnaire and a checklist. The data were analysed using inferential statistics. The study revealed that undergraduate students possess adequate knowledge of Instagram and TikTok as learning spaces and are competent to harness the features of Instagram and TikTok to learn language skills and language content. The study also shows that age and gender influence undergraduate students' competence in using Instagram and TikTok. The study recommended that undergraduate students should harness the potential of Instagram and TikTok on activities that will enhance their linguistic repertoire.

Oyekan (2013) proposed the use of E-learning approach to teach and learn the Yorùbá language. He opined that the Information and communication technology (ICT) is a good tool to increase the people's interest in learning the language.

Blindspot and limitations in the integration of technology in language teaching

In recent years, the integration of technology in education has become increasingly important in order to meet the changing needs and demands of the 21st-century classroom. However, when it comes to the teaching of language in Nigeria, there is a distinct blindspot in the utilization of technology. This blindspot has hindered the development and implementation of effective language teaching strategies that harness the power and potential of technology.

Technology as we know it is based is developed countries, and English is the major means of communication in those countries. Moreover, most of the technologies were developed with English language, this has made it difficult to use these technologies to teach indigenous language. For instance, languages in Nigeria, especially Yoruba language has tone mark, and it is strenuous to find apps or technologies that has tone marking features.

One of the main reasons for this blindspot is the lack of expertise and skilled manpower in the field of technology. Nigeria, due to limited resources, has not been able to develop the

necessary local manpower or attract skilled experts from abroad. This lack of expertise has severely hindered the application of technology in language education, as teachers are not adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills to integrate technology into their teaching practices. Dada and Olaniyan (2021) opined that teachers both at the pre-service and in-service levels seem to lack adequate computer skills to be able to integrate computer technology into the teaching and learning process in schools.

Chun, Smith and Kern (2016) stated that language teachers often find themselves caught in between contradictory discourses as they make decisions about how to use technology in their classrooms. On the one hand, technology is often seen as a means to enhance intellectual capacity and creativity. Moreover, educators are increasingly under pressure to use technology to prepare students to live in a technologically interconnected, globalized world (even if it is not entirely clear what skills and competencies students must have in order to function effectively in such a world).

Another factor contributing to this blindspot is the limited internet connectivity, high costs of devices and data, and electricity shortages in some areas hinder the widespread adoption of technology in language teaching in Nigeria. Although efforts have been made to improve internet access, connectivity is still limited in many institutions. This limitation further restricts the application of technology in language teaching and learning, as access to online resources, educational websites, and interactive tools is often impeded.

Moreover, the lack of emphasis on creativity in teacher education institutions has also perpetuated this blindspot. Creativity is a critical skill for teachers in a rapidly changing educational landscape, yet it is often neglected in teacher training programs. Without fostering creativity among students, educational development in Nigeria has led to unemployment, underemployment, and inadequacies in preparing individuals to cope with technological advancements. This lack of creativity has been reflected in poor teaching practices observed in secondary schools. Dada and Olaniyan (2021) were of the opinion that there is a resistance to change from the traditional pedagogical methods (the chalk – talk method) to the interactive, more innovative and technology-based method brought about by computer technology. Teachers seem to be apprehensive of the demand that learning to teach through the use of technology will place on them.

The school curriculum is also a major setback. The content of the school curriculum and the examination procedure have not given enough support for the integration of computer technology into the teaching and learning process of the schools. For computer technology to be fully integrated into teaching and learning process, it has to be embedded in the content of the school curriculum and the evaluation process (Mangal & Mangal, 2009).

Another challenge that teachers face in the integration of computer technology into their teaching is the lack of synergy among the various stakeholders (parents, school authorities, teachers, students and the government) to be able to create a favourable environment where the integration of computer technology into the teaching and learning process can strive (Dada & Olaniyan, 2021).Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, investment, and policy reforms to ensure equitable access to technology for all schools in Nigeria.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Language Teaching

Artificial Intelligence (AI) according to Santiana and Marzuki (2023) is a system that, over time, will progressively blend seamlessly into various human tasks, fading from view as users acclimate to the other technologies integrated into their everyday routines. As a result, human dependence on AI may become routine. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a type of computational creativity that has heightened interest in the development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology (Cheng & Day, 2014).

Many artificial intelligence technologies have been deployed to help machines gain creativity. One of the functions that AI can play is the process of teaching and learning a language enabling students to accelerate their study of a specific language (Kite-Powell,

2017). Learners can learn a language through repeated sentence structures that reveal the links between words. More precisely, it assists the learners in improving their speaking skills, particularly their pronunciation and listening abilities. Artificial intelligence (AI) designs software that sifts through knowledge and performs distinct functions independently, such as computation or student queries (Ali, 2020; Kannan & Munday, 2018).

Strategies for Effective Integration of Technology in Language Teaching

Teacher training and professional development

To overcome the challenges of limited technical expertise, providing comprehensive teacher training and professional development programs is crucial. Teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively integrate technology in language teaching. Ongoing support and learning opportunities can help teachers embrace technology confidently and utilize its full potential in the classroom.

Teachers should adapt to the use of technology

Language teachers should be at the forefront of technological innovation. They should be encouraged to infuse technology into their teaching practices through professional development programs and training. By introducing and utilizing technology in context, emphasizing its importance as a literacy tool, and providing opportunities for its use, language teachers can effectively integrate technology into their classrooms.

Adapting curriculum and instructional methods for technology integration

Integrating technology into language teaching requires adapting the curriculum and instructional methods to incorporate technology effectively. This involves aligning learning objectives with appropriate digital tools and resources, designing interactive activities, and using online platforms to facilitate student engagement and collaboration. By carefully integrating technology into the curriculum, teachers can create an enriching and engaging learning environment.

Promoting equity and inclusivity in technology-enhanced language education

To ensure equitable access to technology-enhanced language education, efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide. Providing access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital resources for all students is essential. Additionally, attention should be given to addressing any potential biases or barriers in the use of technology to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities for all learners.

Non-Governmental Organizations' support

Efforts should be made by Non-Governmental Organizations to support governments in order to augment their efforts, particularly in the area of funding. Strong government commitment, support, and monitoring should also be built into programs that integrate technology in language teaching. Increasing awareness among educators about the usefulness of technology in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is crucial.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of technology in language teaching holds immense potential for Nigeria. By leveraging technology, one can overcome the current blindspots in language education and create a more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning experience for students. However, it is essential to address the challenges surrounding technology accessibility, teacher training, and cultural considerations. Moreover, it is imperative that efforts are made to improve technology infrastructure and ensure its availability and accessibility to all schools, bridging the digital divide and creating equal opportunities for students across Nigeria. With strategic planning, investment, and collaboration among stakeholders, Nigeria can embark on a journey towards a technologically enhanced language teaching approach that empowers learners, preserves cultural heritage, and prepares them for a globalized world. Embracing technology is not just a choice but a necessity if teachers in Nigeria are to unlock the full potential of language education.

Recommendations

1. Nigeria government

should prioritize investments in technology infrastructure to fully harness the potential of technology in language teaching.

2. Schools, Ministry of Education and stakeholders should implement comprehensive teacher training programs that equip instructors with the necessary skills to effectively utilize technology in the classroom.
3. Nigeria government should encourage and partner with the necessary bodies to see to the development of technologies trained to understand indigenous languages. Efforts should be made to develop culturally relevant content and tools that resonate with students' backgrounds and experiences.
4. Access to technology remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly in rural and underserved communities. To bridge the digital divide, concerted efforts are needed to ensure that technology is available and accessible to all schools across the country. Government initiatives, public-private partnerships, and community-driven projects can play a vital role in expanding access to technology and reducing disparities in educational opportunities.
5. Achieving success in integrating technology into language teaching requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, technology providers, and community organizations. By fostering collaboration and sharing resources, expertise, and best practices, Nigeria can leverage collective efforts to advance technology-enhanced language education and drive positive outcomes for students nationwide.

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