

Promoting Children's Language Learning Through Digital-Based Literacy

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Abstract

Technology is constantly changing the world to a place driven by ICT and increasingly making high numbers of the 21st century children a set of digital natives. Despite children's exposure to the digital world and strong policy provisions on ICT in education, language teachers are yet to fully leverage on the importance of technology in teaching and learning particularly at the primary school level. This study, therefore, investigated how children's language learning has been improved through digital-based literacy. It discussed the relevance of digital-based teaching as against the chalk and talk method wrapped with memorization, repetition and note-copying. The study hung on two theories; Technology Acceptance Model 2 and Uses and Gratifications Theory. It utilized historical research by exploring literature in the library, on the internet and other secondary sources to collect data which was analyzed using content analysis. The study revealed that technology supports manifestation of child-centred teaching and learning situations which in turn makes pupils to explore, observe, engage and solve language related problems independently. The study concluded that even though the influx of technology enhances effectiveness in language learning; teachers still remain the pillar for quality instruction in education. It then recommended that teachers must be trained and supported in using technological devices while teaching and pupils must be exposed to only educative media content while learning.

Keywords: Technology, Primary-pupils, Language, Digital-based, Literacy, Digital natives.

1. Introduction

Digital innovation has taken over quite a number of human activities to the extent that the entire world is now gravitating towards electronic everything like e-banking, e-commerce, e-library, e-governance, e-learning etc. Its inclusion is felt in all aspects and stages of life. As a result, we cannot ignore its contributions to education particularly with learners at the primary school level who can safely be called digital natives.

Basic education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (2014) encompasses the Early Childhood Education (0-4), and 10 years of formal schooling. At this level, as embedded in the NPE (2014), education is entitled to enjoy some technological supports to aid learning. These supports are not limited to: enhancement of the study of language through provision of Information Technology hardware and software, establishment of facilities and necessary infrastructure for the promotion of Information Technology (IT) at all levels of education.

These policy provisions have been equally seconded in the works of Makinde, Adetokun and Abbass (2020), Obanyn (2020), Mopelola (2021), Apata (2021), Makinde, Adetokun and Hunpegan (2021) that the roles of technology in language teaching and learning can never be underestimated especially when the world is rapidly moving towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution driven by technology. They noted that traditional conception of learning no longer suffices because the current generation of learners live in a digital ecosphere and therefore, have early interaction with digital technologies.

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As a result of this development, digital-based literacy, which deals with propagating the skills to live, learn and work in a society where communication and access to information through digital technologies, is extremely important if truly children’s language learning is to be enhanced (Western Sydney University, 2022).

Despite children’s exposure to the digital world, researchers’ advocacies for digital innovation in language learning and strong policy provisions on ICT in education, there is still a wide gap to be filled as regards children’s language learning through technology. No doubt, language teachers are yet to fully leverage on the importance of technology in teaching and learning particularly at the primary school level. This study, therefore, investigated how children’s language learning has been improved through digital-based literacy. It discussed the relevance of digital-based teaching as against the chalk and talk method wrapped with memorization, repetition and note-copying.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Theoretical framework

This paper is driven by two theories; Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT). TAM was first developed by Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw in 1989. However, Davis and Venkatesh in 2000 came up with a more advanced model based on some shortcomings of the first that were revealed through research and called it TAM 2. The upgraded model (TAM 2) is the version adopted for this paper.

According to Venkatesh & Davis (2000), behavioral intention to use a system is determined by two beliefs; perceived usefulness: which is the extent to which a person believes that using the system will enhance his or her job performance, and perceived ease of use: referring to the extent to which a person believes that using the system will be free of effort.

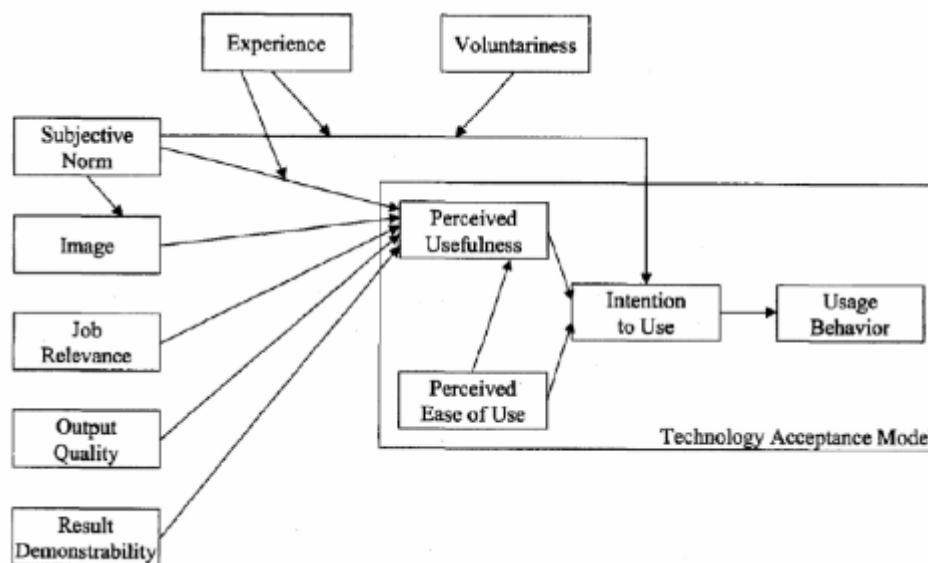


Figure 1. TAM2 model Source: Venkatesh and Davis, 2000.

The uses and gratifications theory was propounded by E. Katz, J. Blumler and M. Gurevitch. It was an off shoot of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. It is an audience centered theory that assumes that people use the media in different ways to satisfy their various needs. The needs could be:

- Cognitive: acquiring knowledge and information.
- Affective: satisfying emotional needs
- Personal integrative: self-esteem needs
- Social integrative: socializing needs
- Tension free: Escapism needs

Gratification for these needs can be derived from at least three sources. They are: media content, exposure to the media and social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media. Priority would be given to cognitive

needs in this paper. The two theories were chosen because while TAM2 establishes the fact that ICT's perceived usefulness and ease of use should make its usage in Nigerian education system accepted fully, UGT stresses that ICTs gratify some education needs better than any other literacy tool.

2.2. The status of language learning among primary school children in Nigeria

There are no one size fits all definition of language as no one person should presume to have a final say on matters relating to language. Also, its definitions are not difficult to find. However, definitions of language have been aptly captured in different works of renowned scholars like Okebukola (2019), Kolawole (2019), Makinde, Adetokun and Abbass (2020), Obanya (2020), Murthy (2015), Omoike, Alufohai and Idiakhwa (2020) etc. Their definitions featured in various publications with attention placed on language as a means of communication, language as conventional, language as dynamic. Hence, this study did not bother to define the concept rather explain it from already existing definitions given by scholars. This is aimed not to complicate an already over flogged concept.

Language, as a matter of common knowledge, is the medium of communication through which we express our emotions, feelings and thoughts to our fellow people (Murthy,2015). Jespersen (1933) explained that language is nothing but a set of human habit, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings and especially to impart them to others. Makinde, Olaniyan-Shobowale, Adetokun and Hunpegan (2021) equally pointed out that from all the various definitions of language, one could say that language is an expression of thoughts or ideas. It is the combination of words and it consists of words and sentences. This translates to means that it is used for expressing ideas by means of speech sound.

Language learning, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), is the formal study of language rules and it is a conscious process. Makinde et-als (in print) pointed out that language learning and teaching reflects in matters related to language policy in education, a mechanism used to create language practices in educational institutions, especially in centralised educational systems like that of Nigeria. It helps to make decisions in the specific contexts of schools and universities in relation to mother tongue, foreign and second languages. The decision often includes issues such as:

Which language(s) to teach and learn in school?

When (at what age) to begin teaching these languages?

For how long language (number of years and hours of study) should be taught?

By whom and for whom? (who is qualified to teach and who is entitled or obligated to learn?)

How? (Which methods, materials, tests should be used?)

Obviously, in Nigeria the teaching of language in education as articulated in the National Policy on Education (2014) is fashioned towards a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preservation of cultures. As a result, every child must learn language of the immediate environment. Likewise, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages.

However, Akinsola, (2022) pointed out that the NPE has gone through developmental stages right from when it was first published in 1979, revised in 1981 (2nd Edition), 1988 (3rd Edition), 2004 (4th Edition), 2007 (5th Edition), 2014 (6th Edition). Akinsola (2022) concluded that the current educational policy (6th edition) has 10 sections. In this study, authors will talk on where language teaching and learning is emphasised at the primary level.

❖ 1 Year of Pre-Primary Education

Medium: the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community

❖ 9 Years of Basic Education

Content (*Primary Education Year 1 to 3*): English Studies; One Nigerian language; Arabic (Optional)

Content (*Primary Education Year 4 to 6*): English Studies; One Nigerian language; French language; Arabic (optional)

Content (*3 Years of Junior Secondary Education*): English Studies; One Nigerian language; French Language; Arabic (Optional)

Medium

Year 1 to 3 – Mother tongue or language of the immediate community

Year 4 to 6 – English language

3 Years of Junior Secondary Education – English language

2.3. Affordances of digital based literacy for language learning

Affordances can be defined as the qualities and or properties of an object that define its possible uses or make clear how it can or should be used. A major affordance of ICTs in literacy is that it is centered around the learner therefore it involves the learner fully in the process of learning as opposed to traditional methods where learning is restricted to only what the teacher has to offer. This affordance does not rule out the importance of the teacher's role but makes teaching and learning easier and faster. Ghavifekr, Kunjappan, Ramasamy and Anthony (2016) came up with discoveries in relation to using ICTs for literacy and one of them which is perceived usefulness will be discussed along the lines of language teaching and learning.

Perceived usefulness is expressed in the extent to which teachers believe that using a particular technology would enhance their job performance. Hence, if teachers feel there is no need to question or change their professional practice then, they are unlikely to adopt the use of ICT tools. However, if they perceive ICT to be useful to them, their teaching and their pupils' learning, they are more likely to have a positive attitude to using ICT in the classroom. However, teachers are not likely to discover the gold mine in digital based literacy for language learning and teaching if they themselves have not been exposed to learning and teaching language through digital literacy. On the other hand, primary pupils are quite malleable and their being digital natives makes them at home with digital devices for language learning. It would only require the guidance of an instructor (teacher) for the sing along rhymes from "Cocomelon", "Little Treehouse" and "Hello Tiny" among others to go from just fill in the gaps entertainment to actual language learning. Thus, the perceived usefulness for the language learner is reflected in how they can consciously and unconsciously learn language from the digital devices they are surrounded with both within and outside the school and other formal learning environment.

The digital devices, according to Okebukola (2021), that are available for teaching and learning language include computers, televisions, mobile phones and tablets; however, one device that has become readily available and accessible over the years is the mobile phone. Onasanya, Ayelaagbe and Laleye (2012) said that the icons and text descriptions of most digital tools make it very easy for anyone to operate as well as use effectively. Abdullahi (2014) established that ICT removes problems concerning space and time because the student can collect and exchange information with teachers and fellow students anywhere and at any time; provides a global pool of knowledge with little or no stress; allows for self-paced and self-based learning; makes learning interactive and joyful through multimedia tools and opens windows for new thinking, an atmosphere of innovation.

The perceived unavailability and inaccessibility of digital literacy tools have overtime been used as reasons why the Nigerian government and concerned educational bodies have not intensified efforts to fully integrate digital-based literacy. However, the era of using this as an excuse is fast drawing to a close because Munshi (2015) established that out of the estimated 7 billion people on earth, 6 billion have access to a mobile phone whereas only 4.5 billion have access to a toilet. This connotes that toilets are seen as more of a luxury than necessity in this technology driven era of ours. Since Nigerians are part of those 6 billion people, it means Nigeria has the wherewithal to fully expedite the use of digital-based literacy for language. Starting off with mobile phones may seem quite insignificant and a far cry from the computers, tablets and global positioning systems that more technologically advanced countries use, but it is surely a step in the right direction. Besides, Onasanya et.al (2012) affirm that the learning curve of the mobile phone is very short thereby making it easier to use for learning than computers. Etim and Enyi (2016) also add that learning with mobile phones helps to combat resistance to the use of ICT as it bridges the gap between mobile phone literacy and other ICT tools literacy. They also propose that the utilization of mobile phones aids the acquisition of literacy to an extent as it improves its user's skills, self-confidence and life chances.

3. Conclusion

The highlighted perceived usefulness documented from previous studies within and outside Nigeria proves that digital literacy plays a very significant role in language learning and would facilitate the achievement of quality education for every Nigerian child if adopted. The study tried to establish that ICTs can gratify cognitive needs in very sophisticated ways thereby making it easier for the Nigerian child to compete favourably with other children around the world. It further emphasized that the teacher plays a vital role that cannot be ruled out so teachers must be adequately trained in teaching with these technological devices.

As rightly pointed out by Poonpon, Chansanam, Srisawat and Poochanon (2021), technology in education increases student-centred learning approaches and reduce teacher's dominating roles particularly in a classroom. They continued that employing technological process in teaching and learning of language brings about positive attitude to learning. Also, it engages and motivates language learners. The relevance and influence of digital based literacy in language study is inherent in the popular phrase 'we learn to read and we read to learn' which overtime has been rephrased as 'we learn to read and we read to learn online'. Furthermore, Makinde (2021) recounted that technology has helped in the process of developing, producing and storing of language materials. He cited some of the materials developed, produced and stored in technological devices as Let's Read, Je ka kawo, Mu Karanta. All available and assessable on android devices for reading purposes.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. Educational technologists must rise to the occasion of developing more digital tools that will enhance/promote teaching and learning at the primary school level.
2. The place of digital tools in promoting language learning must be defined. They must be used as a support rather than master- replacement for effective language teachers
3. Use of digital tools at the primary school level must be censored to guide against child abuse or assault and so that their use will be effective.
4. Government should give all necessary support for the advancement of digital literacy in Nigerian schools. Technological and scientific research must be sponsored by them

It is recommended that the government, educational institutions, corporate bodies and well-meaning Nigerians rise up to the challenge of making the provision of the National Policy of Education on ICT integration in learning workable in all our primary schools as its inclusive and involving nature would go a long way in promoting and encouraging language learning.

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