



English Language Teaching in a Globalized and Digital Age: Implications for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development in Nigeria

Theresa Ohi Odumuh and Famogbiyele Olaleye Taiwo

University of Abuja, PMB 117, Nigeria.

National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, 6 Mike Akhigbe Way, Jabi District PMB 543 Garki, Abuja, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The spread of English as an international language and the emergence of the Internet as a fast communication channel are dual issues that define ELT in a globalized and digital age. Since its conception, the Internet has revolutionized the ways of human communication as well as English language learning in a global context. But the implications of this powerful force are yet to be fully recognized and realized in education and teacher education in Nigeria. Teachers of English language as well as learners of the language today need a new set of critical and interpretive skills. This paper attempts to discuss the impact of the Internet on English language learning as well as the need for new frameworks for teaching English language in a digital age in Nigeria.

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Introduction

The last few decades have seen a growth in the role of the English language around the world as the lingua franca for economic, scientific, educational and political exchange. Matthews, (2000) defines the term lingua franca as 'any language used for communication between groups who have no other language in common' (p.209). Today, 85% of the world's international organizations use English as their official language in international communication (Crystal, 1997). Language is a very important instrument for global networking and English language in particular has facilitated the development of globalization and Information and Communication Technologies. Globalization is accepted by most scholars as the diffusion of ideas, practices and technologies. In Nigeria, some of the current challenges in education are directed towards access, quality of teachers, equity and equality, funding and most recent are the challenges brought about by Globalization and Information and Communication Technologies. The aim of this paper is to relate globalization and digital age to English language teaching, teacher education/teacher preparation in Nigeria, the new strategies for development of appropriate teacher competences, skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for dissemination of these innovations. The paper finally looks at the challenges posed by new technologies in teaching English language and suggests ways of coping with these challenges.

Key concepts

Globalization is a relatively recent term used to describe the changes in societies and the world economy that result from dramatically increased international trade and cultural exchange. Globalization was first used in economics to describe the increase of trade and investing due to the removal of barriers and the interdependence of countries. However, this term as a concept is multidimensional and affects every aspect of human life such as the social, cultural,

educational and political aspects. Giddens, (2000) defines globalization as the sharing of knowledge and culture around the world simultaneously despite the physical separation. The "global village" and "flat world" are only two of the many metaphors used to describe globalization. They capture the essence of this process that has profoundly changed how we live, work, and entertain.

Globalization in relation to English language teaching implies the integration among all scholars of English in the world, exchange of ideas using reflective approaches, discussing issues relating to teacher training and re-training, learner needs and working through linkages to achieve both international and local objectives of teaching English language. As expected, the interpretation of English language teaching in different parts of the globe could vary. The concern however, is for scholars worldwide to work together, share their ideas, reflect on the past and current researches into teaching challenges and advance through interaction to address them. An important challenge of globalization in the developing countries is therefore the pressures to adapt to changing technologies [Obioma, 2009]

Crystal [1999] in Okwudishu [2003] defines globalization in the context of language as a new trend in education in which a 'global' or universal language is used for mutual interaction and hence facilitates international cooperation among nations. Globalization therefore encourages new channels, network and practices of communication which are not dependent on geographical proximity [Toolan, 2000]. As Okwudishu [2003] rightly observed, these channels, network and practices of communication largely depend on language. Language on the other hand is a very important vehicle for education. Globalization has impact on a number of issues related to language used for education such as the level of proficiency of teachers, the learners' performance problems, methodology

issues, how to integrate the local needs of learning the language with international best practices, teacher training and development etc. Globalization therefore brings together scholars [professors and researchers] and students in academic mobility. Such interaction offers them the opportunity to focus and share ideas on comparative international education practices.

Digital literacy on the other hand encompasses all digital devices, such as computer hardware, the internet, and cell phones. A person using these skills to interact with society may be called a digital citizen. Schools, more than ever, in developed countries today are continually updating their curriculum for digital literacy to keep up with accelerating technological developments. This often includes computers in the classroom, the use of educational software to teach curriculum content, and course materials being available to students online. Some classrooms are even designed to use smart boards. These techniques are most effective when the teacher is digitally literate as well.

When the Internet first emerged, the early drift among the educators of English was to see how it could be employed as a tool in teaching English (Warschauer, 1995). Computer was then seen as an optional or supplementary tool, among several others, used for teaching English. Today, however, the significance of Information Technology for teaching or learning is widely acknowledged. In fact, with the advent of the Internet, the computer - both in society and in the classroom - has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication

The Internet appears to transform the ways of human communication and language learning. It has created a necessity for language teachers to fully understand that they can share ideas and relevant experiences with other scholars within Nigeria and in the international world. Teachers need to develop digital literacy that will enable them cope with the demands of this innovation in teaching. Learners of English will equally need a new set of literacy skills for English language acquisition. Teachers can only disseminate information through these technologies if they have acquired the skills and can confidently use them.

Take reading and writing for example: Reading is not just a psycholinguistic act of decoding letters and words. Rather, it is a social practice that takes place in particular socio-cultural contexts (Gee, 1996). As a result of the Information Technology revolution, there is a shift in reading practices from the (paper) page to the screen. This shift will no doubt also change how we as educators teach things like skimming, scanning, and guessing words from a context (Anderson-Inman & Horney, 1998). Ability to read from the screen according to Shetzer & Warschauer, (2000), include the following skills:

- Finding the information to read in the first place through Internet searches, etc;
- Rapidly evaluating the source, credibility, and timeliness of information once it has been located;
- Rapidly making navigational decisions as to whether to read the current page of information, pursue links internal or external to the page, or revert back to further searching;
- Making on-the-spot decisions about ways to save or catalogue part of the information on the page or the complete page; and
- Organizing and keeping track of electronic information that has been saved.

Parallel to the changes learners need to make in their reading practices, involving the Internet, Faigley (1997) and Shetzer & Warschauer, (2000 p.35) posit that the new types of writing skills which are required in the context of the Internet include:

- Development of shared skills for abstraction of words, sentences and paragraphs so that they may become mind-vid:
- Integrating texts, graphics, and audio-visual material into a multimedia presentation;
- Writing effectively in hypertext genres;
- Using internal and external links to communicate a message well;
- Writing for a particular audience when the audience are comprised of unknown readers on the World Wide Web: and
- Using effective pragmatic strategies in various circumstances of computer-mediated communication (including one-to-one discussion lists), e-mail, and various forms of synchronous real-time communication,

Implication for the Preparation of Teachers in Nigeria

Feiman-Nemser (2001) asserts that a teacher's preparation and development may be divided into three stages: pre-service teacher education, induction as a beginning teacher into the teaching profession, and in-service professional learning – with each stage building upon the knowledge and skills developed in the previous stage. Traditionally, teacher education programmes aim to equip prospective teachers with the necessary competence to deliver knowledge and skills for students to meet the manpower and or social needs of stakeholders in both economic and social developments. However, preparing teachers for the globalised and digital age requires a close look at what it means to teach and learn in increasingly networked, technology-rich and digital classrooms.

Teacher preparation programs need to create learning environments, where teachers can explore issues that are relevant and develop pedagogies that are effective. True professionalization of language teachers entails embracing the best practices in the world through continuous linkages with other scholars. It requires teachers to assume appropriate roles of mentoring the growing teachers in the teaching profession. The experienced language teachers must be able to demonstrate their skills in teaching English, participate in local and international researches by networking and be involved in community development in order to mentor the growing teachers. To support this view, Cochran- Smith, (2003) reiterates that teachers need to develop new images and expertise to design and bring about meaningful learning with technology. He emphatically states that:

The responsibility for preparing qualified and competent teachers ... continues to rest primarily with teacher education programs at higher education institutions. Whether by design or by diffusion, then, this means that teacher educators—those who teach the teachers—are now the linchpins in educational reforms of all kinds (2003 p.5).

However, the process of teaching and learning with technology appears to still be in the early stages in Nigeria. Teachers are only starting to come to grips with the changes to pedagogy required to engage students in technology-rich learning environments. Nigeria's Internet sector has not helped matter as it is hindered by the country's underdeveloped and unreliable fixed-line infrastructure. A study conducted by Internet World Stats on internet usage

statistics in Nigeria found that as at 2000 and 2006, 0.1% and 3.1% use internet either at home or at work.

However, by 2009 the percentage has jumped to 16.1%. This is in contrast to what happened in developed nations. A study conducted by Statistics Canada (2001) of urban and rural Canadians aged 15 and over found that 52.8% of Canadians had access to the Internet and 42.2% had an Internet connection at home. Further, Statistics Canada (2002) reported that, in 2001, 7 in 10 households are online daily and 3 out of 5 households reported spending 20 or more hours per month on the Internet

Strategies for Developing Teacher Competences in Nigeria

Fulton, Glenn & Valdez (2003) from their investigation into how teachers are prepared to effectively use technology in classrooms found some strategies useful. These strategies were also reiterated by Warschauer & Healey (1998) and Warschauer & Cook, (1999). The views are summarized below.

Strong leadership: Ability to provide needed support are required both from senior administrators in teacher preparation programs and by departments of education. This condition is requisite for a teacher education program that seeks to prepare candidates to use technology effectively and it must be maintained over time

Technological infrastructure: There is need to create technological infrastructure in schools as this will be the basis for providing technical training for teachers in supporting the integration of ICT.

Building teachers' confidence: Teachers' personal comfort and confidence in using technology and their own technical expertise are critical as it affects how they approach the use of technology and how they design lessons and learning environments for student use of computers.

Support for teachers from within and without: This is not only essential but crucial. Administration needs to be supportive by identifying with the innovation in teaching. There is equally need for support from people outside of school, such as parents, community leaders, school's district or Ministry of Education personnel.

Start-up funding: For the innovations to survive adequate funding is needed.

Student support and enthusiasm: Student support and enthusiasm is also critical as they impact teacher motivation to sustain the innovation.

The School-Net is an example of internet interface. Its origin was in Canada where it was introduced to increase teachers' exposure to information technology and to enable them have access to millions of students. School-Net facilitates student and teacher interaction using discussion groups. The same idea of School-Net Africa was initiated in 1999 at the United Nations Economic Commission. The aim is to examine how ICT can contribute to the development of the continent. School-Net Nigeria is also an offshoot of the School-Net Africa. It was introduced in September, 2001 and received the support of the Federal Ministry of Education.

The aim is to transform the educational process by ensuring that the secondary school students are introduced to ICT. It is also to expose as well as build teachers confidence in their use of ICT in teaching. School-Net Nigeria therefore seeks to improve educational policy delivery and bring about effective educational process both at the primary and secondary schools. It was established as a partner organization of the Nigeria Education Tax Fund [ETF]. The core mandate of this project is to establish Digit-Net Centres

in the schools. For the purpose of implementation, the Federal government has established School-Net centres in the six Geo-political Zones as pilot projects. Although this is a clear indication of government's commitment to the implementation of ICT policy, so much is still expected. A lot of teachers only use computers for typing examination questions, processing of examination results and development of learning materials. English language teachers rarely use computers, internet and other technologies for course delivery and for interaction with other academicians. The reason is that most of them lack the skills to operate the new technologies. In the higher institutions for example, students use computer such as word processing, spread sheets and graphics for preparing their assignments and in carrying out other academic related work only. The students are still not using the internet for interaction with their teachers nor with fellow students across the continent as is the practice in many developed countries.

In preparing teachers for the digital age, according to Wilden (2011), there are seven steps which he simplifies as follows. Teachers, he said, need to:

- Get access to a computer with an Internet connection.
- Learn how to search for information on the World Wide Web.
- Learn how to send and receive e-mail.
- Learn how to join and participate in news groups, fora, and find colleagues with similar interests.
- Learn how to attach documents and other files to e-mail.
- Learn how to create, publish, and update a home page.
- Learn how to type with both hands without looking at the keyboard.

In addition, he suggested that scholars who support this innovative pedagogical approach need to address four overarching themes: vision, disposition and capacity building, professionals in learning communities and scholarship.

When preparing teachers to teach in the 21st century, consideration needs to be given to the following:

Vision: According to Breuleux (2001), vision is about defining, recognizing, shaping stages toward a goal. It is not a proposal to embrace the status quo; it is about encouraging a discipline and a capacity to see the present, to see where lies the beginning of tomorrow, the potential for change.

Disposition: This entails willingness on the part of teachers to learn and to embrace relevant changes that can enhance their effectiveness. English language teachers' attitude to technology innovation in education and openness to accept them are crucial issues for the process of globalization and digital literacy.

Capacity Building: A systemic approach to capacity building is required if innovation is to be initiated and sustained over time. This entails making teacher capacity building a regular, continuous process and strategy for improving teacher skills. Using Cheema's (1997), four levels of capacity building, Breuleux et al. (2002), explored the characteristics of each level in relation to effective use of ICT. First, building capacity at the individual level requires skill development which indicates that teachers are also learners. Second, at the micro level, building capacity requires teachers having the necessary resources and support to fulfill the vision and goals of the school. Third, building capacity needs to occur through interrelationships between entities (school, school jurisdictions, or the whole educational system). Fourth, at the macro level, building capacity occurs through the creation of an enabling environment.

Establishing Learning Communities: Hargreaves (2002), claims that “strong professional learning community is a social process for turning information into knowledge. It brings together the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers in a school, or across schools, to promote shared learning and improvement.” Additionally, the use of networked technologies is transforming the traditional environment that teachers have experienced (e.g. web-based teaching, video-conferencing, cross-cultural sharing, and different types of interactive and multi-media materials). Teachers are now beginning to use such opportunities in the networked professional learning communities to share resources and expertise, discuss pedagogical approaches, reflect on practice and provide support for their colleagues as part of the community experience. With this transformation, the teachers (pre-service and in-service) will experience new roles and responsibilities as they begin to work with others.

Scholarship: Hutchings & Shulman (1999) refer to scholarship of teaching as involving ‘a systematic investigation of questions related to student learning, the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth’ (p. 13). An essential aspect of globalization is sharing of experience with caution by taking into cognizance variations in the objectives of English language learning, the learning environment, access to technologies, funding and other issues that are unique to individual countries. Breuleux (2001) further reiterates that: Learning and teaching with technology becomes a collective, collaborative socio- technical architecture, similar in a sense to democratic governance or collective gardening. It becomes everyone’s responsibility to document and report relevant experiences that can be shared to improve teaching and learning.

Attitudinal change on the part of the teachers to willingly accept to use technology to improve their teaching is therefore imperative. Richards and Rodgers [2005] point out the urgent need for teachers to respond to technological changes because the potential of the internet, the World Wide Web, and other computer interfaces have not only captured the imagination of the teaching profession but is influencing both the content and the form of instructional delivery in language teaching.

Professional Development for teachers in the use of ICT

Empirical studies have established that teachers’ ability and willingness to use ICT and integrate it into their teaching is largely dependent on the professional development they receive (Davis, 2003). Computer education introduced into the Nigerian secondary school since 1988 has largely been unsuccessful as a result of teachers’ incompetence (Yusuf, 1998). For effective professional development of teachers therefore their competence in the use of ICT must be addressed.

Conclusion

All over the world, the use of information and communication Technology is changing the face of teaching, learning and research. Nigerian educational system cannot afford to take the back seat. As observed by Blommaert (2005 and 2008), globalization produces opportunities as well as constraints, new possibilities as well as new problems. Thus, the dynamics of globalization, and information and communication technologies on our economic, social, education and cultural life, though offering novel opportunities, pose definite challenges to the dispensation of education in the current times. In language education, teacher

educators need to understand that they are entering, or have already entered the biggest language/linguistic revolution ever.

Eastment (1999), estimated that there were 1,000 English Language Teaching (ELT) sites devoted to language learning activities, resources, and materials on the internet. In the eighteen years that have passed since then, the number of ELT sites has grown exponentially. The corollary of this is that there is need to help teachers develop the appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, and perspectives to teach English. To prepare this new generation of teachers, we need a teacher education system that is not only globally but also technologically compliant.

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