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**THE EXTENT OF ICT APPLICATION IN NOUNS' LANGUAGE
LEARNING PROGRAMME**

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT) is vital to distance learning language programmes when made available and used effectively. ICT resources encompass an array of technological tools, which create opportunities for collaboration, brainstorming, feedback, dissemination of information, etc. This study investigates the extent to which these ICT tools are used by the National Open University of Nigeria to enhance its language learning programme, on one hand and the extent to which the students access and use the technologies, on the other hand. In this study, the survey method was adopted and structured questionnaires were administered to 131 undergraduate from both the Port Harcourt and Yenagoa study centres who were selected as the study sample. The data were presented in summary tables and analysed using the simple percentage method. The findings show that both the facilitators and the students greatly rely on the use of computers, internet and e-documents for course content delivery. Instructional videos, multimedia projectors are also available but not as frequently used as tools for instruction by the facilitators as the computers, internet and e-documents. The study recommends that the institution adopts radio and television broadcast as part of her mode of instruction in the Yenagoa and Port Harcourt learning centres as well as increase the frequency of her use of other ICT resources such as instructional videos, electronic databases and the use of multimedia projectors for teaching.

Keywords: ICT, language learning programme, distance learning, National Open University of Nigeria, E-learning

Introduction

Information Communication Technology (ICT) refers to the totality of methods and tools that are used in gathering, storing, processing and communicating information. When ICT is used in education or to foster learning, it is called E-learning Technology or Educational Technology (Olotola & Olatoye, 2015). Educational technology here therefore refers to the effective use of technological tools in learning.

Nigeria has begun to adopt the e-learning modes. In recent years, she has embraced aspects of these e-learning modes in her educational programs. In the case of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), students can access their study modules online although they may also procure the print version of their lectures that may be given in addition to periodic contacts with their facilitators. This type of program is known as distance education which has been traditionally been defined as instruction through print or electronic communications media to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 1996). The National Open University of Nigeria implements the blended learning, or sometimes called, the Mixed Mode approach. This instructional approach combines the best features of the traditional

classroom with the online classroom to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of both (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003).

ICT as an enabling tool in distance education allows for the presentation and demonstration of course content, gives opportunities for drills and practice, and aids interaction and collaboration by using networked computers and the internet thereby enriching the students' learning experience. These technologies, when adapted, enrich the distance interaction between the teacher and the learner as well as lead to the production of highly interactive self-paced learning systems that when used within the context of distance education, can benefit the learners who are often separated geographically from each other and their instructors. The use of these technological resources serves as input, which is vital in the language learning process.

Krashen's Compelling Input theory states that to make sure that language acquirers pay attention to input, it should be compelling. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), compelling means that the input is so interesting that you forget that it is another language. It means that you are in a state of flow, which means that the concerns of everyday life and even sense of self disappear, even our sense of time is altered and nothing but the activity itself seems to matter.

This study argues that language input alone is not the only source of compelling input rather the media through this input is conveyed and may contribute towards making the language learning process compelling. The use of multimedia and ICT resources in teaching and learning will contribute to deeper understanding of the course material, grant the learners access to a wide variety of information in various formats such as text, pictures/pictograms, audios, and videos, engage students by providing the tools with which they can analyze the world, etc. In the view of Phillips (1997), multimedia is characterized by the presence of text, pictures, sound, animation and video; some or all of which are organized into some coherent program. These resources used in the language learning will no doubt make the lessons more vivid thereby actively engaging the language learners and eliminating boredom.

Therefore, the objectives of this study include the following:

- i. To determine the types of ICT resources used by National Open University of Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain the extent of the use of these resources at National Open University of Nigeria.

Literature Review

The world of information and communication technology (ICT) has become a massive learning environment where collaboration, brainstorming, feedback, networking, opinion building and sharing, and the dissemination of information are possible. Indeed, it has become a global village of limitless possibilities. Many limitations have now broken down and information travels at greater speed. Foreman et al (2002) cited in Selwyn, Gorard, and Furlong (2002) state that the growth of ICT has coincided with growing political recognition and that the production and distribution of knowledge are becoming increasingly significant with regard to the economic competitiveness and development of countries around the world as 'knowledge economies'.

According to Foreman et al (2002), as technology advances, ICT affects language teaching and learning and most institutions of higher learning around the world now offer online courses as the internet, by its nature, offers learners an innovative and easy ways to learn. Online resources have become indispensable to the vast body of students who engage in researches. Through blogs, online videos and open educational resources, learners are able to access content from leading educators and researchers around the world. Liverpool, Marut, Ndam and Oti (2009) while examining the University of Jos ICT Maths initiative, are of the opinion that efforts to introduce technologies in higher education must extend beyond technology transfer to consider what is known as effective innovation.

The authors identify four factors that make an application possible as enabling, limiting, motivating and inhibiting which can be identified at the system, organizational, software, and individual user level and that the motivating factors must always come from the human dimension, the messages transmitted (software). While observing the amount of energy spent on understanding and using the technology, the authors lament that there is little energy and time left for developing quality materials and courses since the goal of technological tools is increased openness and development. They further note that E-learning initiatives must not be seen as 'complete' rather as continuously evolving. Hence, they recommend that users of these technologies stay in touch with new processes and tools that can enhance collaboration and increase efficiency.

Manir (2009) notes that many researchers and professionals are still struggling to know why many users have stop their online learning after their initial experiences and also observes that the Nigerian educational system is witnessing critical shortage of appropriate teaching materials and ineffective system for digital learning resources creation, storage and maintenance. The aforementioned shortcomings of distance education observed by Manir (2009) notwithstanding, the greatest usefulness of it is that successful teaching and learning can take place despite the fact that the teacher and the learner are physically separated during the learning process. Through the use of ICT resources, this gap can be bridged. Thus, most distance education programmes employ a combination of audio-visual media to facilitate learning. The teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge for the student but rather acts as the facilitator who supports learning while the students actively participate. With this method, learning has become a sort of collaboration between the student and the teacher.

Omotosho, Lateef and Bello (2015) investigated the use of ICT for distance learning by students of the National Open University of Nigeria. The researchers adopted the descriptive survey design for the study and used the questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. The target population was the students of the Lagos study centre of the National Open University of Nigeria with a total population of 2,800 registered students. This study did not solely investigate the language learning programme of the institution rather the study was spread across the six schools namely the schools of Science and Technology, Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Human Resource Management and Centre for Continuing Education and Workplace Training. To ensure adequate representation, the researchers adopted the simple random sampling technique and selected 10% of the registered students from each of these six schools comprising 280 respondents. In addition to administering the questionnaires, observations were also made.

The findings of this study indicated that majority of the respondents were skillful on the use of ICT and ICT applications such as internet browsing and electronic mails. Also, there was a high level of accessibility to ICT facilities for distance learning by the students who agreed that the use of ICT has been beneficial to their studies as it has enhanced access to quality education, improved level of knowledge, access to leaning through a variety of methods and the removal of time constraints. However, it was discovered that erratic power supply, constant breakdown of facilities, inadequate bandwidth, viral attacks and limited access to information posed a serious problem to the use of ICT by the students at the National Open University of Nigeria.

Aramide and Ayankola (2008) examined the extent of ICT application and utilization for distance and open learning education at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Their study entailed a descriptive survey research design in which the questionnaire was adopted as the major instrument of data collection. A total of 113 copies of the questionnaire were administered out of which 87 copies were returned. Their findings revealed that the radio, televisions, computers, video cassettes/VCDs as well as audio cassettes/CDs were the most commonly available ICT facilities at NOUN. Also, it was discovered that most of the facilitators at NOUN were not competent in the use of these ICT facilities.

Ololube, Ubogu, and Ossai (2007), in investigating the role of ICT in distance education, gathered data for their study using the observation method and by making reference to document materials. As part of the observation process, one of the researchers participated in the activities of an open and distance education scheme as a part-time lecturer while others observed the research insights. Observations were made of the physical settings of some of the institutions and the quality of ICT skills of those working in them while the materials used for the study were textbooks, articles and reports although they add, as part of their limitations, that their investigations was based on a small size of literature. They discovered that the high hopes and enormous enthusiasm by the federal and state governments in the establishment of open and distance education programmes were hampered by the realization that Nigeria is faced with serious challenges which are in the areas of ICT usage, integration and diffusion. They also noted a misconception in African nations that distance educations amount to the provision of quality education that is cheap. But, this is far from the case as most of these countries are increasingly beginning to find that the provision of the basic infrastructures required cannot even be guaranteed. They noted another grave challenge facing distance education in Nigeria as that of integrating the new ICT knowledge into academic courses and that distance education curricular and infrastructure as well as the organization of the programmes need to be better designed to enable them cope with unanticipated and unintended results that confront them as they operate.

Ogidan (2010) identified the technological facilities and their functional use in providing support to the learners who were unable to attend regular classes in the National Open University due to social, structural or provisional situations. His report identified the following technological strategies/devices provided for communicating with the students directly or through their study centres include the radio phone –in program, audio/video tapes, live teleconferencing, computer mediated learning, mobile phone contact, audio cassettes, video CD, radio broadcast, online synchronous mode of interaction and online asynchronous mode of interaction. He noted that the institution utilizes these technologies so as to provide academic, administrative and psychological support in order to ensure that students do not drop out of their academic pursuits but complete their studies.

Research Methods

The quantitative and survey research designs were used for this study in order to determine the impact of interaction and the effective use of ICT in the National Open University of Nigeria's ODL. The primary method of data collection consisted of copies of the questionnaire that was administered directly to the study sample of 131 undergraduate students from both the Port Harcourt and Yenagoa study centres. The survey method is suitable for collecting information about behaviours, attitudes, feelings, perception and beliefs of people. For the survey, a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. It contained close-ended questions which were subdivided into three sections. The first section was designed to collect demographic data about the respondents. The second section was aimed at identifying the available e-learning facilities at National Open University of Nigeria and the extent of their use. This involved the collection of quantitative information. The study population consisted of all the students enrolled at the undergraduate level of study out of which one hundred and thirty one (131) undergraduate students from both the Port Harcourt and Yenagoa study centres were selected as the study sample. The sampling method used was the census method, which refers to the quantitative research method in which all the members of the population are enumerated. This method was used for this study due to the low number of students enrolled in both study centres under investigation. In addition, because not all the students have the same contact hours with their facilitators with cases of absenteeism, the questionnaire had to be administered over a period of five months and this made the retrieval of the research instrument very difficult. Even at that, the researcher could not capture all the students for this study. The sample for the study was, therefore,

drawn from all the undergraduate students available at the time of this study. The data obtained was presented in summary tables and analysed using the simple percentage.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data generated from the responses of the students are represented in tables 1 and 2 below, while the corresponding analysis follows each of the tables

Table1: Types of ICT resources available at NOUN

ICT RESOURCES	AVAILABLE		NOT AVAILABLE		TOTAL	
	No. of Respondents	(%)	No. of Respondents	(%)	No. of Respondents	(%)
RADIO BROADCAST	9	6.9	122	93.1	131	100
TELEVISION BROADCAST	4	3.1	127	96.9	131	100
INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO	62	47.3	69	52.7	131	100
MULTIMEDIA PROJECTOR	49	37.4	82	62.6	131	100
ELECTRONIC DATABASES	75	57.3	56	42.7	131	100
INTERNET	125	95.4	6	4.6	131	100
COMPUTERS	116	88.5	15	11.5	131	100
E-DOCUMENTS	119	90.8	12	9.2	131	100

In table 1 above, over 90% of the respondents state that the radio and television broadcasts are not available at the Yenagoa and Port Harcourt study centres of the institution. 47.3% of the respondents agree that instructional videos are used while less than 40% of the respondents indicate that the institution uses multimedia projectors.

Table 2:The degree of use of ICT resources by NOUN

ICT RESOURCES	OFTEN USED		SOMETIMES USED		RARELY USED		NEVER USED		TOTAL	
	No. of Resp.	(%)	No. of Resp.	(%)	No. of Resp.	(%)	No. of Resp.	(%)	No. of Resp.	(%)
RADIO BROADCAST	1	0.8	6	4.6	10	7.6	114	87	131	100
TELEVISION BROADCAST	2	1.5	4	3.1	10	7.6	114	87	131	100
INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO	15	11.5	29	22.1	28	21.4	59	45	131	100
MULTIMEDIA PROJECTOR	12	9.2	20	15.3	30	22.9	69	52.7	131	100
ELECTRONIC DATABASES	30	22.9	30	22.9	43	32.8	28	21.4	131	100
INTERNET	77	58.8	31	23.7	18	13.7	10	7.6	131	100
E-DOCUMENTS	69	52.7	35	26.7	16	12.2	11	8.4	131	100
NOUN APP	72	55	22	16.8	22	16.8	15	11.5	131	100

From the table above, it is clear that majority of the respondents agree that radio and television broadcasts are never in use while other resources such as instructional videos, e-documents, internet, electronic databases and the NOUN application are clearly often used.

Discussion of findings

Table 1 indicates that these ICT resources are available but are not frequently used by the instructors. Furthermore, over 90% of the respondents state that the internet and e-documents are readily available with another 88.5% of the respondents identifying computers as also available. These responses clearly show that not only are these ICT resources used but that they are easily accessed by the learner, hence their popularity.

Table 2 analyzes the degree of the usages of these ICT resources in the learning centres. Although the respondents readily point out the non-availability of television and radio broadcasts in the Port Harcourt and Yenagoa learning centres, other resources such as instructional videos, multimedia projectors, electronic databases, internet, e-documents and the NOUN application are used although in varying degrees. For instance, the internet, e-documents and the NOUN applications are often used which suggests a strong reliance by the facilitators and the students on these resources as their primary teaching and learning aid. The response for the instructional videos, multimedia projectors and electronic databases indicate that these resources are clearly available although they are not often used. Perhaps this is an indication of unwillingness on the part of the facilitators to use them. Whatever the reason, it clearly shows that it is not enough for an institution to possess these resources but it must ensure that they are maximized so that the learners can derive maximum benefits from them. For instance, instructional videos, when used in instruction, make the lesson more vivid in the mind of the learners and offer a fresh way to receive instructions unlike the monotonous and sometimes boring face-to-face lectures.

Conclusion

This study investigated the extent of ICT application by NOUN to enhance her language programme. By using the survey method, questionnaires were administered to 131 undergraduate students at the various levels of study; it was discovered that NOUN does indeed make use of ICT resources for instruction. However, some ICT tools such as radio and television broadcasts are clearly non-existent in these centres. Videos and multimedia projectors, though available, are not frequently used. The implication of this is that the institution is not providing sufficient compelling input. Furthermore, the full benefits of these educational technologies cannot be harnessed. For instance, since media can convey both sights (visual) and sounds (audio), they help to engage the learner, sustain his interest and make the lesson more vivid. In addition, it relieves boredom since the facilitator ceases to be the only source of knowledge in the language classes. Although, the researcher could not ascertain the reasons for the lack of use of these available resources by the facilitators due to certain constraints, NOUN needs to ascertain the reasons of this and discover ways to overcome this challenge. Also, NOUN must ensure that the facilitators are not just encouraged to use these ICT tools frequently but that they should be used in such a way that both the objectives and the benefits of their usages remain with the language learners long after the language classes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- i. NOUN should make efforts to ensure that both the radio and television broadcasts are extended to the Yenagoa and Port Harcourt learning centres of the institution.
- i. The institution must ensure that these ICT resources are not just available but their benefits must be maximized. This entails the active usage of these ICT resources such as the multimedia projectors and videos by the facilitator to deliver instructions effectively and

facilitate learning among the students. This will ensure that the programme's learning objectives are achieved.

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