Pedagogical Innovations in the Post-2020 Second Language Teaching and Learning Classroom

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, which exposed the weakness of social systems and infrastructures in many parts of the world, compelled governments across the world to lock down vital public systems for several months. The worst hit was education, besides health. Educational institutions in developed countries promptly switched to online modes of teaching, while other countries shut down their institutions.Nigeria lost almost one academic session, a situation that threatened the actualisation of the country's educational goals and, thus, national development. Educational administrators in the country were eventuallyforced to review and restructure pedagogical practices, shifting from the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching to blended and online learning platforms facilitated by information and communications technology, ICT, albeit with little or no successdue to government factors, teacher factors and learner factors. The experience triggered global thoughts towards diversity, equity, inclusion and access to education, with some international organisationsestablishing banks of open educational resources (OER). It also attracted attention to the phenomenon of learner engagement.Using Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework designed by Mishra and Koehler (2006),this study examines the post-COVID pedagogical setting. It focuses on the concept of learner engagement as a factor of personal engagement, organisational engagement and situational engagement, besides new devices and methodologies capable of assisting language teachers in their effort towards professional proficiency. TPACK framework identifies the three domains of knowledge essential for effective integration of ICT into teaching and learning as: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledgeand technological knowledge.

Key words: ICT, digital technology, learner engagement, distance education.

Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in every human community. It is the bedrock of interpersonal, national and international communication, a reality that tends to highlight the importance

ofthe processes that facilitate the acquisition of basic linguistic skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Also, methodology is central to the language teaching and learning process (Ahmadi, 2017).

The focus of this paper is on language learning and teaching in the post-COVID dispensation, an era that relies heavily on the use of digital technology in the language teaching/learning process – which provides the learners and their teachers unrestricted access to useful learning resources, with particular attention to learner engagement towards the delivery of effective and functional education.Technology-mediated learning denotes a context in which learners' interactions with learning materials, their colleagues and/or teachers are mediated through information technologies (Alavi and Leidner, 2001).

Some scholars have explored the concept of the evolution of learner engagement, its role and characterization in contemporary society, and how it can assist institutions to support learner success. One of them isMercer (2019) who avers that"Motivation is no longer the primary key for successful learning." p.3

This paper examines the novel methodology capable of assisting language teachers in the pursuit of their professional objectives, particularly the concept of learner engagement – as a factor of personal engagement, organisational engagement and situational engagement – and new technological devices, such as virtual reality, augmented reality or wearable technology, otherwise called emerging technologies – including cloud computing, computational thinking and natural language processing.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines the plight of our learners in view of the new mode of knowledge transfer imposed by the pandemic in a new world – the new normal in a contactless society. The study examines the innovations, including methodology and the digital communication platforms and technological devices,which can be utilized to fill in the pedagogical gap created by the onslaught of COVID-19.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to examinenew pedagogical devices capable of facilitating the easy attainment of the goals and objectives of second language teaching and learning schemes in the post-2020 dispensation.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the mode of language teaching and learning before 2020;
2. determine the impact of the pandemic on the right of the youth of the country to quality education;and
3. **find out the methodological and technological innovations that language teachers can employ to ensure an easy accomplishment of the goals of language teaching/learning in the post-COVID dispensation.

Research Questions

 i. What was the mode of language teaching and learning before 2020?
 ii. How has the pandemic impacted the right of the youth of Nigeria to quality education?
iii. What methodological and technological innovations can language teachers employ to ensure an easy accomplishment of the goals of language teaching/learning in the post-COVID dispensation?

Significance of the Study

The trauma of COVID-19 forced the world to reappraise its practices and adopt an entirely new culture.This study offers a new research direction to stakeholders in the education industry, especially learners, educators, administrators and managers, with a focus on the imperative of new methodology and technological innovations to assist language teaching and learning in the post-COVID period.

The study is also of significance to the different functionaries and agencies of government involved in the implementation of educational policies, particularly the Ministry of Education, and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

Justification of the Study

The challenges experienced by stakeholders in the education sector during and after the lockdown and other effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational system in Nigeria have necessitated thoughts about new methodologies and technological innovations to improve the quality of the teaching/learning processes, and thus, facilitate the attainment of the country's educational goals.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the language teaching/learning processes in schools in Nigeria with a focus on new methods and digital technology capable of assisting educators and administrators of education in Nigeria in the post-COVID era.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006). Mishra and Koehler identify three domains of knowledge for the effective incorporation of ICT into the teaching and learning process. They are content knowledge (CK) – knowledge of the subject matter to be learned or taught, including knowledge of central facts, concepts, theories and procedures; pedagogical knowledge (PK) – knowledge of the processes or methodologies of teaching and learning, including values and aims, classroom management, lesson preparation and planning, and student evaluation; and technological knowledge (TK) – knowledge of standard technologies, including books, blackboard or chalkboard or whiteboard, and more advanced technologies like the Internet and digital video and how to operate those technologies, i.e. good knowledge of the operating system.Discussing the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, Luhamya, Bakkabulindi&Muyinda(2017, p. 21) conclude, "The integration of ICT in teaching and learning (IITL) brings about powerful learning environments and helps students to deal with knowledge in active, self-directed and constructive ways. Thus, all avenues to foster it should be explored."
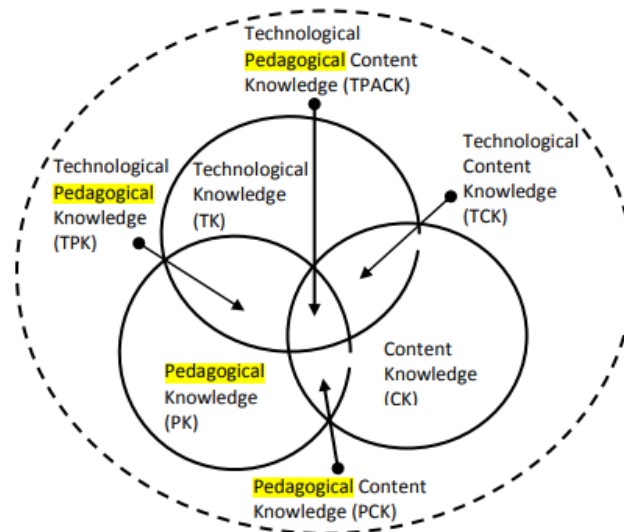
Figure 1: The TPACK framework (source: Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1025, Figure 4).

In Figure 1 above, Mishra and Kohler (2006) suggest that the interaction of CK, PK and TK yields three paired knowledge domains, viz.: pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) – applicable to the teaching of specific content such as knowing what teaching approaches fit the content, and effective arrangement of elements of the content; technological content knowledge (TCK) – knowing how technology and content are reciprocally related, i.e. how the subject matter can be altered by the application of technology; and technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) – knowing the existence, components and capabilities of various technologies as they are used in teaching/learning contexts, and conversely, knowing how using particular technology can alter teaching (Luhamya, Bakkabulindi&Muyinda, 2017).

Literature Review

Many studies have shown the effect of technology in increasing learning motivation, offering learners more efficient means for language learning, and raising the performance of language learners in terms of output, interaction, feedback, affect, motivation, and metalinguistic

knowledge was moderate (Golonka et al., 2014). The greatest victims of the pandemic codenamed COVID-19 were health and education, besides the economy – the very fabric and soul of society. Educational institutions in Nigeria were shut for almost one year, thus denying the teeming population of the youth of the country access to education. The deficiency of traditional classroom learningbecause of the outbreak of COVID-19 has compelled many educators to embrace computer-assisted language teaching methods. This involves the use of new technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality or wearable technology or what some scholars refer to as emerging technologies including cloud computing, computational thinking and natural language processing to impart knowledge to the learners.

However, some scholars argue that motivation is no longer the main key tosuccessful learning. Speaking in July 2019, at the Cambridge Better Learning Conference, Sarah Mercer suggests how to establish a positive classroom culture by fostering engagement, maintaining that, "effective language learning needs learners to be active and engaged – it is not a spectator sport! The challenge for teachers is to ensure learners do not sit on the sidelines but get actively involved in classroom life and tasks."p.1

Learner Engagement

Some studies examine the building blocks of learner engagement, which include involvement, interaction, intentionality and quality of effort. Research has proventhat engaging learners in the learning process enhancestheir attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Writing on psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work,Kahn (2017) discusses three psychological conditions – meaningfulness, safety and availability – and their individual and contextual sources. Kahn maintains that individuals can deploy varying degrees of themselves – physically, cognitively and emotionally – in work role performances, with correspondent implications for both their work and experiences. This principle also applies to the teaching/learning context, especially in higher education where learner engagement is a top priority for educators.

Super Skills (4 Cs)

Several studies have highlightedthe link between engagement, achievement, and school behaviour across levels of social and economic advantage and disadvantage. Mercer (2019, para 1) maintains that "even the most motivated of students can become distracted," adding that if learners are engaged, "there's a much higher level of learning taking place." Kivunja (2015) avers that the most motivated student can be distracted in these difficult times when teachers need to put in extra effort to hold their learners' interest and attention, a situation that calls for adjustments to lesson delivery to significantly increase learners' engagement, rather than a change to the syllabus or the lesson plan. Learners in the 21st century, particularly in the post-COVID dispensation which has led to the establishment of Open Educational Resource (OER), have gone beyond the basics, and are advancing towards the 4 Cs – Creativity, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Collaboration. These skills, otherwise called "super skills", are connected to pillars of learner engagement, which are: academic, intellectual and social-emotional.

Learner Engagement Strategies

The language teaching and learning process can be made captivating with the deployment of several learner engagement strategies: where the teacher connects learning to the real world, engages with their learners' interests, fills "dead time", utilises group work and collaboration, encourages learners to present and share their work regularly, giveslearners a say, and gets them moving. These can be facilitated with the deployment of clear learning objectives, expectations and consistency in the teacher's daily routines, which set the stage to engage the learners; frequent discussion opportunities; hands-on activities; break-out rooms (BOR) in online classes; mini-group activities; small group instruction; all participation responses; and games.

Digital Language Teaching/Learning and Testing Resources

Besides games and online videos, which are popular technologies used in some traditional classrooms, some of the digital devices and/or facilities available to educators in contemporary language teaching and learning situations include (Shadiev& Yang, 2020; Ahmadi, 2018; Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson &Freynik, 2014; Ziegler, 2016; Sydorenko, Daurio& Thorne, 2018):

1. Internet forum or message board: useful in language learning for facilitating student-to-teacher and peer-to-peer online asynchronous communication;

2. Instant Messaging Computer-mediated communication (CMC)/Instant messaging or social networking services: services used by learners to initiate and send textual and voice content (voice call) to their peers (i.e. other learners) and their teachers;

3. Social Networking Language learning through social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

4. Virtual Reality (VR): an immersive and interactive medium based on manipulations of the visual, tactile, and aural senses mediated by the computer;

5. Websites and Digital Resources: a collection of public websites, personal websites and digital resources provided on the internet, which are good sources of linguistic and cultural knowledge;

6. Speech Recognition (SR): a computer-based process in which speech is decoded and transcribed;

7. Collaborative Writing Tools: e.g. wiki, Google Docs, blogs and web-based word processing used to practise writing, editing, and speaking skills;

8. Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS): a computer-based educational system that offers individualised instructions like a human teacher;

9. E-Books: books in digital format for reading; a digital library is a collection of documents in digital format, including newspapers, magazines, papers, images, sound files, and videos – for reading, listening to and watching;

10. Electronic Dictionaries: An e-dictionary is a digital learning tool that converts the traditional printed dictionary into a digital one, meant for learning online texts;

11. Multimodal films: comprising video production process which aids students' multiliteracies, expanding their comprehension of the interplay between various resource modes of meaning construction;

12. Video and audio transmission: video or audio content of language learning resources which can be shared among learners;

13. Online Video: video content delivered or available over the Internet;

14. Voice Recording: which can be used for comparison, rating, and corrective feedback;

15. Augmented Reality: a technology that integrates digital information and real environments and facilitates learner senses of reality;

16. Corpus: a collection of speeches, conversations, writings, etc., that learners utilise to study and describe a language;

17. Automated Feedback: computer-supported corrective feedback, as opposed to conventional face-to-face corrective feedback;

18. Robots: a machine that resembles a living creature;

19. Clickers: keypads used by students to respond to the lecturer's questions;

20. Wearable Devices: worn as clothing or accessories, such as head-mounted displays or Google Glasses, which record and report information about attitude or behaviour, e.g., sleep patterns/physical activity (they can inspire learners to adopt good habits and improve their health); and

21. Games: recreation tools offering exciting, convenient and creative ways to learn.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptivesurvey design, using qualitative data to assess the capacities of the Nigerian education system in the post-COVID-19 dispensation, stressing the imperative of new pedagogical devices, particularly digital language teaching.

Population

The population included all educational institutions in Nigeria, from pre-primary, primary and secondary to post-secondary institutions – both public and private institutions.

Sample

Data for the study were collected from learners and teachers at the three levels of primary, secondary and tertiary education. The schools were purposefully chosen with due consideration of their towns and the location of the cities to reflect the urban and rural settings; public and private sectors. A total of 300 learners spread across the three levels of primary, secondary and tertiary education were involved in the study as well as 50 teachers/lecturers.

Instrument for Data Collection

The data used for this study were gathered from libraries, museums, archives and media establishments.The data included oral interviews, recorded material, books, journals and other publications. These were gathered from individuals and groups, archives, libraries, media establishments and sundry other institutions. Besides *traditional media – electronic and print:* radio, television, including cable and satellite television, newspapers and magazines, some data were gathered from credible online sources.

Data Analysis Method

The data used for the project – including oral interviews, recorded material, books, journals and other publications – were described, classified, synthesised and analysed through the sifting process.

Summary and Conclusion

This studyexamined some of the emerging trends in technology-enhanced language teaching and learning in the post-COVID erawith the aid of data gathered mainly from credible online sources and traditional media – electronic and print:radio, television, including cable and satellite television, newspapers and magazines. The youth are arguably the worst hit by the incidence of the virus which engendered educational stagnation, causing considerable panic and anxiety, as practically all educational institutions on the continent were placed on full lockdown from March to October 2020, with some of them, particularly private schools and colleges, switching to partial distance education or remote learning – online/e-learning – mode.The use of technology has become a vital part of the learning process in and out of the classroom, unlike the traditional classroom where educators stand in front of learners, giving instructions using the blackboard or whiteboard. Technology enhancesthe interaction between teachers and learners, provides comprehensible input and output, helps learners to develop thinking skills, promotes learners' autonomy and helps them feel more confident, and increases learners' motivation to effectively learn a foreign language. Learners learn better when technology is deployed in the learning processthrough the use of ICT.

Technology assists learners to develop their higher-order thinking skills, and the learning/teaching process becomes more student-centred with the incorporation of the concept of learner engagement as a factor of personal engagement, organisational engagement and situational engagement.

Recommendations

The study hereby makes some recommendations meant to revolutionise the language teaching and learning process with the aid of technology.

The government must invest more in education; it must increase its budgetary allocation to education and youth development. Teachers must be motivated and equipped with adequate modern teaching tools and the capacity required to discharge their professional duties optimally.

Government must provide functional infrastructure, including stable power supply; and tackle the issue of poverty.

Teachers must create technology-integrated lesson materials, which must concentrate on teaching and learning, besides technology issues.

Language teachers should encourage their learners to use technology in developing their linguistic skills. Technology must be considered a vital part of teaching and learning schemes.

Teachers should deploy technology towards learner-centred instruction rather than teacher-centred instruction.

Language teachers must be trained and retrained on new pedagogical methods and devices.

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