

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There are many ways by which development has come into the pedagogy of teaching Literature in English. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has initiated new possibilities into the classroom. The role of the teacher, the nature and context of learning, as well as the function and relative importance of course content have all been challenged and redefined. Considering the increasing difficulty teachers of literature encounter today in the classroom, following lost of interest in reading books displayed by the majority of students both in the secondary schools and tertiary institutions, the writer tries to point to the need to motivate students, through the use of Information and Communication Technology. This paper concerns itself with the teaching of literature in English by the use of ICT resources. It highlights numerous types of ICT resources and how they can be used to facilitate learning or impact the knowledge of literature effectively and efficiently. The paper also seeks to discuss the potential of ICT. What is the future of literature? And if we cannot escape technology, how can we turn it to our own advantage?

Keywords: *Literature, Genres of literature, Information and Communication Technology, and Education*

Introduction

We live in an era of information explosion. Once there was dearth of information, today we are drowned in the deluge of information. A gale of change is blowing in the pedagogy of Teaching English Language and Literature (TELL) (Barad, 2009). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a catalyst agent. ICT has initiated new possibilities into the classroom. The marriage between education and Internet technology has made a deep impact on perspectives about teaching and learning. Technology, today, has revolutionized in such a way that the methodology used by educators to teach a foreign or second language has changed. In fact, the relationships between teachers and students have undergone a phenomenal change (Barad, 2009). The role of the teacher, the nature and context of learning, as well as the

function and relative importance of course content have all been challenged and redefined. Therefore, all teachers have to place priority on the knowledge of the new world order and it is advisable that teachers be computer literate. This will enable them to carry their students through the journey of technology advancement.

For a long time immemorial, we have been experiencing 'change' in all aspects of life. The world at large is experiencing changes according to Owoeye (2009) and one important area of such is in the area of technology. In the past, we know what technology was and the limit it could operate, but nowadays countries measure their greatness through ICT. We need to know what is happening around the world and that is why we should hear ourselves out in various capabilities and from different countries of the world.

The use of ICT in the classroom is very important for the provision of opportunities for students to learn to operate in an information age. Technology has always been useful in the literary progression of mankind. We need to know that as language is a vehicle of intellectual development, ICT has been improved to do, if not better, the same. We can see that ICT has allowed institutions to respond to societal trends in language and communication and that using technology well in literature classrooms can even enable teachers to be more successful in helping students to be more patriotic citizens. They have to limit the use of outdated instructional materials and embrace the new technology in the discharge of their lessons.

The Term Literature

Literature has been defined by so many scholars from different perspectives. For the purpose of this paper, we shall take a look at some definitions as they relate to our discussion. Asubiojo (1999) cited by Owoeye (2009) defines literature as “a sum total of all the works of imagination, oral or written which have helped to reflect and project the life and culture of a people”. As quoted by Owoeye (2009), Ogunmola (1985), opines that literature is “an act in which imagination has freedom to roam and resilience to nourish feelings”. Akorede (1996) cited by Hadi (2009) says literature is a vital instrument for articulating and interpreting the realities and aspirations of a society.

From the above definitions, we can deduce that literature cannot be isolated from the society, and in every society, literature concerns itself with the representation of human activities. That is why it is a mirror through which we see ourselves or others, so as to correct our mistakes and make amends. It is a subject of study that mirrors the characters of different

behavioural patterns and their reactions to one another in various forms like drama, poetry and prose, and all these should be taught very well in the school by a good teacher as well as a good means of disseminating the message to make the students better citizens.

Therefore, we need to examine what role ICT resources have to play to inculcate these values in our students. Ordinarily, the students in our various institutions do not want to read any more, they prefer to “ping” and “chart” on their blackberry or the common phone with internet facilities. In other words, in teaching literature through ICT resources, the teacher has to use the medium through which the students communicate to one another to impact the knowledge.

Aims of Teaching Literature

The aims which are strived to realize in teaching literature are as follows:

- To cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.
- To develop taste for good literature, distaste for poor writing, ability to read independently. This will help the students to appreciate and understand Nigerian culture as well as world’s cultural heritage.
- To broaden the outlook of our students by exposing them to the philosophies of different authors and experiences of the characters, and by making them appreciate and understand the characters and identify themselves with some of the characters.
- To develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is being read, and to express ideas effectively. This equally encourages students to develop a desire for achievement, continual self- education and self-

improvement both in school and later in life.

- To also foster clear communication of thoughts and making relevant judgments.

The Term Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Literarily, ICT means the use of computer to store information and make it available to the reader or operator. From this, Harlow (2003) defines ICT as the study or use of electronic processes for gathering, storage and making it available using computers. Technology or multimedia is not a teaching method or theory, but rather it is a tool that aids educators by improving access to different types of media already in use.

Technology is used to simulate real-life situations and helps learners to have control over the learning process (O'Leary, 1998). Therefore, Krashen, (2007) claims that using computers for Free Voluntary Surfing will encourage students to wander through the internet and read what interest them. He also claims that it will result in higher levels of literacy. Peterson, (2005) opines that computer assisted language learning provides new opportunities for learners to engage in active communication that facilitates the development of second language competence. For this reason, we want to examine the use of ICT resources in the teaching and learning literature in English. It has worked out in some developed countries and with this paper the writer sees no reason why the use of ICT in schools will not work in Nigeria.

ICT Resources and the Teaching of Literature

Teaching is known to be an act of instruction which has pedagogical implications as it tells us that, there is an instructor who knows something and he equally transfers what he knows well to others. Before teaching can take place, there

should be the teacher who is to teach, the students who are the learners and what to teach as well as the method that would be used to pass the knowledge across. Therefore, Information and Communication Technology is known to be an instrument of teaching and development that turns the whole world into a global village through the interconnectivity of the internet (one of ICT resources), which is known to be World Wide Web (www).

Coming to terms with the digital era can be a difficult task for literature teachers, but it is a challenge that they have to face in order to keep up with the times and manage to provide motivation and necessary skills for their students. We can easily guess that ICT activities only have value if they allow students to develop key skills. A plot overview or a character description on websites such as *sparknotes* or *Wikipedia* give students the easy way out when they are faced with a literary topic. This will allow them to be encouraged when what they have to search for in the dictionary is already on their palm. There are, however, resources which can prove highly interesting and motivating to students. This is to show that ICT enables learners to work at their own pace (Hoven, 1999).

In the past, our teachers used to teach without ICT, but only to those who were powerful in expression and had a great command of vocabulary. One must be good at giving convincing logical, philosophical arguments to succeed in teaching literature. Those lacking such skills may fail to deliver. However, ICT is now of incredible help to teachers in reaching out to students and helping them to learn easily.

The students rarely read the things prescribed in the curriculum. Let us come out of the illusion that students will go to libraries and read. Even when websites are referred to in a classroom, approximately 10% of the students will actually visit and

read the website. The problem is not reading web-resources or the lack of eagerness to learn, but a lack of infrastructure in obtaining easy access to the internet. Somehow, literature students find it awkward to spend time on technology and learn e-skills. So, the best way to enhance reading skills and to empower literature students in the subject knowledge is to have the practice of “collective reading”. This can be done through word or power point file projected on the screen and read collectively. It can also be done by referring to web sites in the classroom or even by using CDs, e-encyclopedia, e-dictionaries, and e-thesaurus, etc.

The learning of literature becomes very lively and interesting if all the students are learning the same thing at the same time. This not only develops reading skills, but it also gives a very good understanding of the subject. It also helps in developing cognitive reading skills. The interpretation of a literary text is a key component in the study of literature. The collective reading also provides some space for individual interpretation. To give an example that came in handy, along with websites, is Microsoft’s Encarta Encyclopedia.

The writer wants it to be clear that all the teachers of literature in English should make extensive use of such an encyclopaedia in the classroom. Encarta made teaching and learning very easy because of its rich resources which include multimedia and images. Similarly, while teaching any concept of literature or any creative work, these e-resources helped to retrieve any sort of ready reference. The literature class then becomes lively as all the students are gaining similar information at the same time. Similarly, live internet connection while teaching literature also has an added advantage. For instance, while teaching modern critical theories like post modernism, post colonialism,

deconstruction, post structuralism, and so on, search engines like bing.com, and google.com are incredibly helpful. Even if we want to discuss the latest in the field of literature, we can click and find websites like www.contemporarywriters.com and get up-to-the-moment information to share with students.

Using PowerPoint for presentation of drama and prose is, now, no longer a new experiment. Even children studying in schools are good at it. The more important aspect is how effectively we can make use of it in a literature classroom. We have a good resource of VCDs/DVDs/Audio books which are related to the text (novel/play) we have in our various syllabus. There is the need to give VCD/DVD to students to view it. Not always can the movie, play or audio book be interesting to view/listen. Very long plays and listening to audio books are at times boring. Viewing plays for more than three hours or listening novels three hours daily for several weeks is not healthy practice in using ICT tools in literature classroom. So, what we need to do is to prepare a PowerPoint presentation of important scenes in the movie and plays and discuss its importance in the classroom. Instead of watching a whole play at once, we can cut the play into bits and pieces (<http://video.google.com>).

Apart from novels and plays in the teaching of poetry, ICT tools can be a great help. Teaching poetry is not every teacher’s cup of tea. Of all the genres of literature, it is the most difficult. The real beauty and meaning of poetry lies in its recitation. Not all teachers are good at reciting. And even someone that is good at reciting may face problems with various poems, ballads, epics, lyrics, sonnets, etc. We can find website like www.librivox.org which has a very good collection of poems in audio version, recited by the native speakers. It is web portal where anybody can upload their recitation

and it is free to download. As we search for a particular poem, we attain several recitations. We can freely download all of them and choose the best one for our classroom. Teachers and students can also upload their own versions of literary works and recitation to the site. Thus, it motivates students to sing poems, record it and upload to the site at their own convenient time.

The Benefits of ICT for Literature Teaching

Everyone has a limited capacity of memory, as such, no one can remember all the information in the world. With e-resources and the internet very handy in the class room, a teacher of language and literature would be confident. As the memory is not over-burdened with facts and figures, the teacher is mentally free to give more time for discussion and explanation. As a result, the students are also empowered to understand language and literature in a better way than they would have.

To believe that, all the students are physically sitting before us and enjoying our oratory and are listening in real sense is nothing but an illusion. They are listening, they are reading and they are also seeing the material. It is well known to one and all that, there are various kinds of learners, viz., auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. Teaching with the help of ICT tools helps address various needs of the learners.

An individual cannot be divided in the water tight compartments of these learning styles. In an individual, there is a mingling of all these types of learners. Some part of oneself is visual; the other is auditory and kinaesthetic. When a teacher uses ICT tools in the classroom, it helps a lot as three senses work together to increase student's proficiency. This leads to student's expression power, as they themselves have seen and listened to poems, pictures, graphics, text, e.t.c, they can express

themselves quite well in examination. Meanwhile in conventional classroom only one sensory perception that is, listening is functioning. At the same time, we can concentrate more on the number of students on the point of discussion. This has psychological better impact, and empower them towards improving their proficiency level (Barad, 2009).

More so, the students would be freed from the shackles and boredom of stereotyped to learning with interest any time and from anywhere. They may be travelling and listening to mp3 recordings and still participate in this type of learning. If they are ill or (because of certain circumstances) are not able to attend classes, there would not be a need to worry because they can access the website and catch up with the missed class. The true spirit of democracy lies in freedom. This type of teaching, leads towards a democratic freedom in teaching and learning.

Challenges Facing the Teaching of Literature with ICT Resources

Despite the somewhat contributions that ICT tools make to better the teaching and learning of literature in English, we should not forget that it is still faced with some constraints in Nigeria. ICT resources can be very effective in some developed countries like USA, Japan, Britain, Germany, China, and so on, we should not forget that we are still struggling to get there. There is the need to examine a short overview on the threats in this ICT enabled teaching-learning system.

First and foremost, most of our literature teachers are not computer literates. In other words, they are technophobic. The teachers should be well versed in the art of using techno-gadgets, internet, e-resources etc. Teachers who are adamant 'not to change' are some of the biggest hurdles in this type of revolutionary teaching.

Secondly, the places where the resources would be used might not have enough infrastructures for effectiveness. In Nigeria, we still have such places where a constant supply of electric power is a dream; and in the most advanced part of the world also, hi-speed internet connectivity is not possible.

Moreso, most of our schools do not have any provision for ICT resources such as ICT centres where the equipment can be installed. Another important point of consideration is students' eagerness and willingness, if they are ready to learn a little bit of internet surfing and e -mailing, it can come as an added advantage to the success of an ICT enabled teaching system. The students, therefore, should be more adaptive and responsive to this method. Fund is another contributory factor to the failure of using ICT resources to teach literature in English.

On the part of the students while trying to show that they can operate the computer, they use the internet negatively. They watch pornographic pictures, they go scamming spend most of their time playing games and they do all sorts of evil acts in the name of ICT compliance. Through this act, some parents have stopped their children from learning computer.

Above all, ICT can never replace a teacher. A man is a better teacher than a machine. But if a good teacher imbibes the use of ICT, it could improve the proficiency level of his students and empower them with better understanding of language and literature.

Conclusion

The days of teaching literature based on the literary text alone are coming to an end. It is true that, teaching literature in the contemporary world, dominated by multimedia, is becoming more and more complicated for English teachers. We feel,

however, that ICT resources maybe the answer to the challenges teachers have to face in order to involve and motivate their students in their literary studies. Consequently, in their analysis of the contribution new technologies can make to teaching and learning, some scholars provided the following with respect to student learning:

- The benefit to students of using new technologies is greatly dependent, at least for the moment, on the technological skill of the teacher and the teacher's attitude to the presence of the technology in teaching.
- The skill and this attitude in turn are largely dependent on the training the teachers have received in this area.

Based on this submission, we should know that technology of itself is not a panacea, and that without skilled application by the teacher, its benefit may not be realised. There is then the need to develop items adaptable to classroom environment. Therefore, any software or hardware to be used must be adaptable for classroom teaching. With this, the teachers and the learners would be proficient in the teaching and learning activities.

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