Functional Literacy: The Effects of ICT on Language Learning in Lagos State Secondary Schools

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Abstract: The study takes a look at Language Learning in Lagos State Secondary Schools. Functional Literacy is the Learning of the basic skills that are necessary for day to day activities of the individual. With the era of new technologies, language classrooms are becoming more interesting and the students are finding it less difficult to access information. The focus of educational systems worldwide includes a basic concept around communication through text and print, which is the foundation of most definitions of literacy. In the conduct of this study the researchers visited five secondary schools in Oshodi local government area of Lagos state. Questionnaire and Oral investigation was used for the study. Out of the 5 schools visited only one of the schools have language laboratory. It was also discovered that the students are even more ICT compliant than their teachers. The study concludes that for the nation to be able to move forward, priority should be given to language teaching and learning in our Schools since it is the only means of communication among human beings. Therefore, the use of modern technologies should be made mandatory in language classes in our secondary schools.

Key words: Functional literacy, language learning, secondary school, basicskills

INTRODUCTION

Literacy means different things to different people. To some literacy is generally associated with reading and writing skills. In some countries literacy programs are designed for the immigrants to be integrated into the national economy. They teach what is called Functional Literacy, that is teaching of the basic skills such as reading and writing which will enable the immigrants to live and participate effectively in the society.

The traditional definition of literacy is considered as the ability to read and write, or the ability to use language to read, write, listen and speak.

According to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his goals, to develop his knowledge and potential and to participate fully in the wider society. The focus of educational systems world wide includes a basic concept around Communication through text and print, which is the foundation of most definitions of literacy. Literacy comprises a number of sub skills, including phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary.

It is necessary for students to learn each of these sub skills in order to become proficient readers. Literacy therefore, has been defined in this study as the ability to read and write and use Numeracy, to handle information, decisions and solve problems, as students, family members, citizens and life long learners.

Types of literacy: There are different types of literacies as listed below but this differs from one society to the other:

- Workplace literacy services.
- Family literacy services.
- English literacy programme.
- Historical literacy.
- Cultural literacy.
- Ethical literacy.
- Economic literacy.
- Socio-political literacy.
- Environmental literacy.
- Health literacy.

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For example, workplace literacy can be defined as literacy services that are offered for the purpose of improving the productivity of the workforce through the improvement of literacy skills. It means basic work and communication skills for those that are specific to the job, not the ability to read books and newspapers alone. It also involves politically correct attitudes and readiness to become an adaptive team player. Cooperative, compliance and collective thinking are essential to workplace literacy. Its goal is compliant and efficient laborers for the global economy. Family literacy services means services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family and that integrate all of the following activities:

- Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.
- Training of parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.
- Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficient.
- An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

LITERACY AND EDUCATION

The Advanced learner's Dictionary defines Literacy as the state of being literate and possessing an education. Education is being equated with the ability to read and write. Education is one aspect of socialization, which involves the acquisition of knowledge and learning of skills. Literacy is fundamental to education and both are sometimes used interchangeably. Literacy is a social phenomenon, developed to communicate information between people. Pattison (1982) describes Literacy as a combination of variables-individual and cultural awareness of language and the interplay of this awareness with the means of expression'. This approach he says will frustrate anyone looking for a simple, mechanical definition because it distinguishes between the attainment of reading and writing skills and the acquisition of literacy.

Reading and Writing may be parts of literacy but do not constitute the whole. In the same vein, Harman (1970) sees a functionally literate person as one with the essential knowledge and skills which enables him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainments make it possible for him to use these skills towards his own and the community's development.

Literacy for information and communication technology: Many nations and people are recording giant strides in technology acquisition. It is no exaggeration that nations like China, Japan and United States are breaking world records in their understanding and application of modern technologies. Some have been to space, some use robots and even their information technology world is very advanced. No wonder Wallerstein (2000) viewed the global economic system as being divided between nations that control wealth and nations from which resources are taken. Further in his world system analysis he came to the conclusion that the core nations have a virtual monopoly on information technology. This in essence may partly be due to their having a good communication system because they have the proper tool for understanding the modern technology.

Recently, the Computer and the Internet have developed widespread use in Nigeria. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Nigerian definition of literacy should include the ability to use the Computer and be able to communicate in a diverse range of technologies. These include mastery of tools like Internet browsers, word processing programs, video cameras, overhead projector, text messages and other audio-visual materials. The use of all these materials in our communication process has given rise to an interest in a new dimension of communication called Multimedia literacy.

Begum and Green (1992) have identified that in common usage, when the words Technology and Literacy occur within the same context, they are in one of the four following relations, either single or in combination:

- Technology for literacy.
- Literacy for technology.
- Literacy as technology.
- Technology as literacy.

According to Begum and Green (1992) to have a satisfactory literacy for technology curriculum, all the above four aspects should be explored and investigated. In order to teach literacy with awareness for development in information technology, the teacher should be willing to acknowledge and utilize the interactions between the two concepts.

Communicating in the internet age: Communication is a process by which directions, information, ideas, explanations and questions are transmitted from one body to another. Generally, communication takes three major forms namely; Written, Oral and Non verbal. Written communication is the information written or typewritten

on a paper for the purpose of communication. It has the advantage of providing records, references and legal defense. The message can be carefully prepared and it can be read by a large audience while Oral Communication is the information passed by words of mouth for the purpose of communication. Oral communication can be face to face meeting of two people or more; it could be a telephone conversation, radio or television communication. Oral communication provides for speedy interchange of ideas with immediate feedback while Non verbal Communication includes facial expressions and body gestures.

The Internet simply means the worldwide assemblage, which connects different types of computers together, basically, in private, government, academics and individual offices, to generate particular information. The Internet is a network of networks, a society of interconnected computers, spanning the entire globe. There are varieties of services that could be performed by the Internet but the most popular of them all is the Electronic Mail popularly known as e-mail:

- Electronic mail is a computer based mode of communication, which enables the exchange of message (s) electronically between computers linked through telephone lines, microwave links, communication satellites or any other telecomm-unication technology. The Internet mail or electronic mail (e-mail) is one of the oldest systems used to communicate with each other and still the most useful today in terms of interacting. Most people prefer to use the electronic mail in sending and receiving messages any where in the world. Basically, millions of messages are exchanged on daily bases all over the world via this e-mail.
- Through the Internet, the speed at which information can travel is faster than the speed of air or wind. Information from any part of the world can now be received within 30 sec.
- The use of Internet has rendered the distance between the receiver and the sender irrelevant.
- There is cost effectiveness through internet communication e.g. with # 50, in Nigeria one can browse the whole world in 30 min.
- It is easy to use. It is not cumbersome.
- It has led to globalization of business activities with all the Internal and external advantages of communication to business organizations worldwide.
- It enhances education and information as they are easily obtained.
- It enhances convenience of information processing as you can operate on Internet in the comfort of your room.

- It enhances interpersonal relationship due to regular contacts.
- Of recent, face-to-face conversation through Internet camera is now possible.
- Opportunity for open-mindedness is enjoyed as participants are not actually physically present (e.g. subordinates and superiors).
- There is an added advantage of Tele-conference/ group discussion.
- Through Internet, advertisement is made easy and widely reaching.
- It facilitates good research.
- It is a good labour market for job seekers.

THE ROLE OF ICT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

ICT has helped to solve some of the problems of language teaching which are stated as:

- Large class size: Most of the language classes are quite large but the use of audio-visual materials has helped in maintaining order in the class, as the students are more attentive when audio-visual materials are being used in the classroom.
- Lack of language laboratories: Out of the five secondary schools visited , only one of them have a language room. Nowadays the language teachers can make use of the radio and the television in the classrooms instead of waiting for the language laboratory. In the absence of a language laboratory the researchers made use of the available ICT materials in the classrooms.
- Most teachers do not pay attention to non verbal behavior in the classroom.
- Nonverbal behavior (gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, use of space etc) is a crucial aspect of classroom interaction which is still absent in most language classrooms.
- The Language Curriculum in Nigeria now laid more emphasis on oracy before literacy in language teaching. This is in contrast with the old teaching which was dominated by the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, lexis and structure and pronunciation.

RESULTS

In Nigeria students are more conversant with the Internet than their teachers. Research has shown that not all language teachers are optimistic about the use of Internet when it is available; some teachers say that it is time consuming. Sixty five percent of the teachers questioned at the secondary schools visited are

electronically illiterate. The remaining 35% that are electronically literate bitterly complain about the epileptic state of electricity in Nigeria, which makes access to the net nearly impossible.

Recently, it is possible to listen to lecture on the Internet. This has also enhanced language teaching in Nigeria. In October 1996, the American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communication and Technology released a draft paper on Information Literacy Standards for Students Learning in this document, they defined three categories which describe the content and processes related to information that student must master to be considered well educated (HREF I, 1996). The three categories are: Information Literacy, Independent Learning and Social Responsibility. This suggests a major reconceptualisation of what is central in education and an exciting challenge for schooling. It is very clear that the nature of literacy is changing in profound ways, but it is still the basis of learning and it is still the technology through which we construct the society.

CONCLUSION

Education is a necessity and it is the hub around which all other issues revolve. For the nation to be able to move forward priority should be given to language teaching since it is the only means of communication among human beings. The use of modern technologies should be made mandatory in language classes.

Finally, the Nigerian government should realize the danger of being left out in the quest for acquiring modern technology and provide necessary amenities to make things work.

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