PROSPECTS OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING WRITING SKILLS

Salamatu Clifford Jindem

University of Jos,
Department of Arts Education
jindemsally69@gmail.com
08039234109

ABSTRACT

This study examined the prospects of information and communication technology in teaching and learning writing skills. The world is globally connected through ICT, hence the need to implement it in schools. Tools, such as word processing software, online writing platforms and digital feedback systems, influence students' writing performance. The study affirms that ICT can positively function in teaching and learning writing skills, sentence and paragraph development by providing opportunities for collaborative learning, instant feedback and self –assessment, however, challenges such as, digital distractions and lack of access to technology have been observed. It recommended that, teachers should create their instruction using diverse interesting ICT materials and expose learners to friendly ICT environment. In conclusion, the paper emphasized the need for effective integration of ICT in writing instruction for better performance

Keywords: ICT, writing skills, teaching, learning, technology integration, education.

Introduction

Writing serves as a medium of communication, as such, it is considered a productive skill that enables writers to express their original view points and ideas through written forms (Vacalares, Clarin, Lapid, 2023). Writing is considered one of the important skills in English Language alongside, listening, peaking and reading. Writing is crucial for a successful learning in higher education and the workplace. The achievement of learners in most academic settings is dependent on their ability to develop a satisfactory degree of proficiency in writing. Thus, writing provides opportunity for learners to examine their work with critical eye looking for ways to improve clear ideas, proper sentence construction and overall effectiveness.

The importance of writing globally cannot be overemphasized, especially in the overall school curriculum. Students' performance in the subject has been discouraging. The West African Examination Senior secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) Report of 2019 revealed that examinees; failed to treat content adequately, inability to express their points coherently, too many errors in applying punctuation marks and poor expressions. Also, the National Business and technical Examination Board (NABTEB) Report of 2017 showed that students' composition writing constituted poor grammatical expression, poor mechanical accuracy and poor arrangement of facts. These problems resulted from students' inability to generate ideas, organize and edit for sentence construction, application of punctuation marks, coherent paragraphs and revising to ensure proper finishing. The Chief Examiners reported that, students' answers to composition questions showed poor knowledge of the writing skills as highlighted earlier and that there had been no adequate exposure of the students to some basic skills of writing may be through appropriate approaches.

Similarly, the National Examination Council (NECO) 2017 also ascribed the persistent failure of students at the senior secondary school level to poor writing skills. Dema (2022) states that candidates' failure in English and largely composition section is due to sketchy points, lack of organization, poor sentence construction, lack of coherent paragraphs because they do not align with the standard required in writing and in the national examinations. This implies that many senior secondary school students show low level of content mastery leading them to inability to generate and construct cohesive sentences and coherent paragraphs that should show a well-developed composition. Diverse effort has been put in place to curtail the situation and ICT is one such intervention.

ICT incorporates all subject areas and is one of the breakthroughs in the 21st century. This method came into being to complement the traditional approach. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education is globalized as many countries have adopted it for easy learning. The change in the learning environment adopted mobile telecommunication which is easy to afford and it provides easy access to getting information, especially wireless and portable devices such as I pods, MP3 players and smart phones. The positive effect of ICT in education cannot be underestimated. Deniz (2022) reiterates that it gives a complete layout for interactive engagement among learners. The use of ICT is quite learner-centred. As a result of students' poor performance in writing and the inappropriate method used in teaching it, the study is set to explore the prospects of ICT in teaching and learning writing skills.

Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored on the theory of the social constructivism which was propounded by Lev Vygotsky. The social constructivism believes that individuals develop knowledge through social interaction with others within the same context. The perspective posits it that, learning is a collaborative process where learners interact with their environment rather than receiving passive knowledge. The theory is related to this work in the use of ICT in teaching writing skills which give teachers and learners the opportunity to develop online teaching materials and use programmes or applications design especially for them to interact with others while they improve their writing skills.

Writing Skills: Writing is the assembling of words, phrases, clauses and sentences structurally and lexically concise for the purpose of making meaning. Gowon and Yashim (2021) assert that writing is an intellectual activity of using graphic symbols orally conceived and truthfully putting them into meaningful context. As a result, it is described as a cyclical activity that goes through a process of re-writing and editing to ensure fluency and meaning in text. Without these efforts, the writer creates ambiguity and makes understanding a difficult task to the reader. In other words, conscious efforts must be put in place to follow the writing process.

Writing is a means of expressing one's thoughts. Hall (2019) says that, writing is an act of expressing meaning or compose a story. It is a fact that, students who have good writing skills are always successful at expressing their ideas and reaching their goals. Also, writing is a process of thoughtfully taking decision on what is necessary and organizing such thoughts into meaningful context. It involves a collection of expatriate skills including letter formation, spelling, punctuation, grammar and organization (Aldin, Omer, Hamid & Elteb, 2019).

Again, Aldin, Omer, Hamid and Elteb (2019) point out that, structurally, any kind of writing skills has three sections, introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction is conceived to draw the attention of the reader and making it clear and readable. The body comprises the development of points by vividly describing, explaining and relating experiences and events. The conclusion sums up, recommends or forward suggestions as solution to problems identified by the writer. More so, writing provides learners the opportunity to develop skills in writing, for example, the sentence is the highest grammatical unit that gives a complete thought. On the other side, the paragraph is the assembling of a thought expressed in sentences, thereby giving concise thoughts to the writer and reader.

A good writing task should have rich content. The writer is expected to tackle the subject matter giving details and meeting the requirements of the examiner. Anyebe, Neple and Onoja (2022) ascribe rich content to having fluent ideas. The authors further reiterate that, having rich content in writing, means the ability to convince the reader to the extent of citing examples and illustrations. Organizing of points is another relevant skill in writing. It means that, every point in a paragraph should be chronologically arranged. It should follow proper sequence of growth. Language expression entails fluency which is achieved through proper clarity, syntactically and grammatically well ordered. Mechanical accuracy takes care of the use of punctuation marks. Punctuation marks give meaning to the writer's expression.

Writing is beneficial to all learners because it cuts across curriculum. Students do not only listen in their subject areas but they take notes during lecture delivery. Also, writing is not a skill for the few but one essential skill for all students planning to enter the workforce. Good writers

always impress their supervisors and naturally, students who have good writing skills are always successful at expressing their ideas and reaching their goals. Writing, enhances the ability to acquire and develop cognitive skills such as generating and organizing ideas, content and language norms (spelling and grammar). Sawalba (2014) says that writing has the ability to solve linguistic issues and assist learners in developing their second language proficiency. Also, writing helps to transmit information, thoughts feelings and reaction.

Technical Problems in Writing: Despite the relevance of writing, it has been observed generally that students' performance in writing is poor. Specifically, Nabhan (2016) identifies some major difficulties face by learners to include poor idea generation and organization, faulty paragraph creation, misuse of the punctuation marks and wrong sentence construction. Writing enhances the development of writing skills but it is not given the optimal attention because the traditional methodology is practiced. Kemboi, Adiena and M'mbone (2014), consequently, students' achievement is not satisfactory and poor writing skill is the main cause. Also, in spite of the fact that, writing is a vital means of communication, students' writing skill is poor.

It could be seen that the major cause of the writing problem is the methodology. It is obvious that in a typical traditional writing situation, a model text is used for learners to follow. They merely use the same type of words, phrases and sentences. There are four stages of the traditional method; familiarization, controlled, guided and free writing. In familiarization, the teacher instructs learners to make exploits on the model text bearing in mind they will produce similar features. In controlled writing, the teacher selects grammatical features and drills learners on pronunciation and memorization over a short period of time, subsequently, exercises are given on the features. In guided writing, learners are assigned responsibility of producing similar text while free writing allows learners to write freely but following the model.

Previous studies have criticized the traditional method as having concern on the finished product (Akinwamide 2018). The author explains that the focus of teaching writing is on different parts, words, phrases and sentences. It is teacher-centred and accords importance to checking of errors in grammar. The stages of the traditional method lacks definite writing activities for learners and it is glaring that writing skills are neglected. The learning process is individualistic and collaboration is not practiced as is currently done in the 21st century language teaching. In the twenty first century teaching, digital technology is globalized in education to complement the traditional method of teaching.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): It involves finding and assessing information using digital tools, for example, social media web browsers and online discussion boards**.** Digital technology provides opportunities that traditional teaching cannot give, for example, ideas, images, graphics and hyperlinks (Deniz, 2022). Digital technology generally is the use of computers and technology assisted strategies to support learning in schools. Specifically, digital technology avails learners the opportunity to use programmes or applications designed for problem solving or open-ended learning while teachers on their part have interactive whiteboards or teaching platforms.

Digital technology in education is globalized as many countries have adopted it for easy learning. The change in the learning environment adopted mobile telecommunication because it provides easy access to getting information, such as, wireless and portable devices like I-pods, Mp3 players and smart phones. Also, laptops computers/mobile phones are revolutionizing education and transforming the traditional based teaching and learning into anytime and anywhere education (Fattab, 2015).

The Prospects of ICT in Teaching and Learning Writing Skills: The prospects of using digital technology in teaching writing is enormous and with digital technology, teaching and learning can take place anywhere not necessarily in the classroom. There are digital tools that learners can use to enhance their learning abilities as such, digital learning is very interesting to use in developing writing skills than the traditional (Sarwat, Kabir and Sehar, 2021). Digital technology has some tools that enhances students learning, such tools include;

Computer Application: Word production programme enhances and guides learners to improve in their spellings. It predicts words suitable for learners to use in their writing. It usually list words that begin with those letters. This measure quickens the speed of typing.

Speech–to–text programme: This is helpful in typing words, most especially during video/audio conferencing. It is hardly achieved when there are distractions, especially when wrong words are typed, wrong spelling of words and a noisy environment.

Text–to–speech: It improves listening, most especially in writing. It provides the right spellings of words when students edit any task given.

Spell–Checkers: It assist writers to identify wrong spellings and correct them immediately.

Computer–mediated–technology: It refers to tools that can be connected to the computer.

Internet: The internet is the largest tool that one can access millions of information in minutes. It is a global village that connects the world. It is at the disposal of writers to access and share ideas as they collaborate with other learners elsewhere in the world.

Social Software: These are programmes such as WhatsApp, blogs, Facebook, twitter and instagram. These are tools where writers can chat and share ideas. Teachers can as well upload writing materials relevant in writing.

Messengers: It is also known as MSN Messenger and windows live messenger. Messenger is a Microsoft program for windows that allow users to chat online using the internet, the examples of messengers are;

Computer – mediated tools like Skype, Imo, Facebook, yahoo and WhatsApp are for educational programmes. The teacher can instruct his learners through messengers. With the use of the messengers, groups can be organized to teach and guide students through voice, text or visually. Through this, learners can raise issues, solve problems and share ideas.

Multimedia technology: Multimedia technologies are digital pictures, scanning audio and visual technologies. They help to assist effective communication, especially in the large usage laboratory.

The Relevance of ICT in Education: The importance of the use of ICT in education cannot be underestimated. The technological tools in ICT offer students, especially in the writing class the environment to interact meaningfully with their teacher and through that, the instructor identifies their weaknesses, select strategies that, suits different learners and their challenges (Karunakaran & Jebakumar 2021). Deniz (2022) asserts that ICT can foster an interactive, engaging, learner-centered platform that enhances creativity, transformation and communication, which in turn encourages self-discovery and independence. Also, ICT promotes interacting with other learners online to improve their writing skills and get to grab new development in the writing unit.

Students hardly get stuck when searching for ideas to compose written texts. Information and communication technology like smart phones, computers and internet promotes learners' abilities to surf and generate information and ideas for their writing tasks. This usually makes the learning process more interesting, motivating, stimulating and meaningful. Through the process, they can generate chunk of ideas that can be implemented in writing (Al-Rowayeh, 2022). Apart from that, there are ICT soft wares that can edit learners' work like sentence and spelling checkers, encyclopedias and online writing laboratories, emails, WhatsApp and internet.

The function of ICT to teachers generally cannot be underrated. It provides essential supports to teaching learning processes. Al-Rowayeh (2022) posits that, it helps the instructor to facilitate language learning and it equally offers teachers the opportunity to use materials that are interesting for learners like challenge board, cloze, columns, hang man, pop-ups, matching, word search, rags to riches, jumbled words, picture and perfect and order list.

Also, digital technology allows learners to receive feedback from their teachers, peers even unknown people with records (Deniz 2022). It is a fact that, this motivates faster learning whether as individuals or groups. They usually use blogs, WhatsApp and other digital tools to chat and edit their corrections in no time. Moreover, sharing ideas among learners nationally and globally strengthens weaker learners to be more involved. The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning activities which is a bigger step away from the traditional teaching.

Challenges

Despite the enormous benefits of digital technology in learning composition writing, there are challenges that are overwhelming the process, most especially in Nigeria. Most schools are not equipped with the digital devices of learning like computers. Worst still, these schools are not even electrified and even if they are, the epileptic power supply in Nigeria is a thing of concern. In fact, there is wide gap in the use of digital technology in some countries in Africa, Nigeria to be specific.

Most teachers and students are not computer literates; therefore, they show negative attitudes toward incorporating digital technology in teaching writing. Teachers' negative attitudes can be linked to expensive training and purchase of computers. Also, government make yearly budgets but little attention is given to equipping schools with digital technology.

Mobile telecommunication, like the mobile phones are expensive to purchase, especially those that are android and others that have internet facility. Most schools in Nigeria are prohibiting the use of mobile phones, especially in the classroom. Sometimes, phones are seized from students and are never returned. In fact, teachers and students lack the knowledge of imparting learning using mobile phones. More so, purchasing the data to browse is another issue in the use of digital technology. It is always like gambling. The quicker one purchases data, the sooner it finishes.

There is large exclusion of the world in digital technology, especially Africa and in Nigeria. Many people's income is too low to gain connectivity (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2021). There is low quality access to devices that are fixed at home. Also, the author adds that there is lengthy proliferation of fake news and cyber-attacks. There is also hacking of accounts and privacy is not secured.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the prospects of ICT in teaching and learning writing skills is an understatement. Globally, ICT is used in education to impart knowledge and if Nigeria should implement it in schools, it will go a long way to enhance learning. It gives and motivates learners in the writing class to engage in various technology activities while they cater for their writing skills, for instance, the spellings and sentence checkers assist learners to write in a comprehensive manner, therefore, teachers are urge to implement it in the teaching of writing skills.

Recommendations

The current method of teaching writing is a move towards incorporating digital technology anywhere and anytime. Learning is no longer confined to the classroom; therefore, teachers should be flexible to accommodate global teaching practices. Language curriculum planners should make adjustments to incorporate digital technology and providing learning materials in English content areas.

Government and non – governmental organization (NGOs) should organize digital technology workshops, seminars and conferences for language teachers. Let them be exposed to creating materials and access information using different devices. This measure will expose teachers to practice how language teaching is done both in native and non – native speaking English countries. Government should supply all current resources, experts and popular professional teachers of English, so that, they will give instruction using digital technology.

Teachers should be passionate about self-development. They should update their knowledge on global teaching practices, especially the use of digital technology. Computer literacy is key to the 21st century teaching and learning. By that, the students teachers are producing would be able to function in all sectors, especially to basic computer knowledge of receiving information and sending through different means like emails, blogs and websites with other students globally.

Government should equip schools with learning materials like computers. Teachers should create conducive learning environment and the teaching process should be learner – cantered while the teacher guides, directs, counsels and facilitates learning activities.

References

Akinwamide, T. K. (2018). Enhanced collaborative teaching method of performance of students in essay writing task. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal (BIRCI-Journal),* 1(3), 84-86.

Aldin, A. M. A. M., Eltayeb, M. M., Omer, Y. O. J., & Hamad, M. N. M. (2019). Importance of writing. *Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychology, 10*(5), 203 –206.

Al-Rowayeh, J. (2022). The effects of implementing ICT and learning English Instruction. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research, 10 (3),* 453-460

Al-Sawalba, A. M. (2014). Potential advantages of process writing for students English Language and Literature at Jaresh University in Jordan. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 2(6).

Anyebe, M. O. (2019). *The writers' compass: a guide for schools and colleges.* Jos: Tomma Global Press Ltd.

Anyebe, M. O., Neple, J. Y., & Onoja, E. S. (2019). Effects of the collaborative approach on senior secondary students' achievement in English composition in Jos South Local Council Area of Plateau State. *KTV Journal of Social Sciences,* 5(1), 231-236.

Dema, T. (2022). Factors affecting the writing skills of students: a case of a higher secondary. *Vietnam journal of educational sciences, 18 (04),* 35-48

Deniz, I. S. (2022). ICT to develop writing skills in English as a foreign language classroom. *HUMANIDADES, 20,* 307-321.

Fattab, F. S. L. (2015). The effectiveness of using WhatsApp messenger as one of mobile learning techniques to develop students' writing skills. *Journal of Education and Practice,* 6(32), 115-127.

Gowon, R. P., & Yashim, H. Y. (2022). Effects of concept mapping strategy on sentence construction, paragraphing and editing in junior secondary schools students' composition writing achievements. *Curriculum, Instruction and Pedagogy; Secondary Teacher Education,* 7.

Hall, A. (2019). *Every child is a writer: Understanding the importance of early childhood.* Clemson: University Press.

Karunakaran, B, & Jebakumar (2021). The contribution of ICT to develop writing skills in ESL classroom. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, communication and Technology (IJARSCT), 4* (3), 123-124

Kemboi, G., Adiema, N., & M'mbone, J. (2014). Challenges in secondary schools in Pokotcounty, Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice,* 5(1), 132-138.

Nabhan, S. (2016). The process approach to improve students' writing ability in English. *Journal of Pengajaran Bahasa Dan Sastra, 13*(2), 67 – 100.

Sarwat, S., Kabir, H. & Sehar, A. (2021*). Effect of computer mediation technology on writing proficiency skills by ESL learners at secondary level in Pakistan*. Elementary Education Online, 20(5), 3648-3661.

Vacalares, S. T, Clarin, E. & Lapid, R. (2023). Factors affecting the writing skills of the education students; a descriptive study. *World Journal of advanced Research and Views, 18* (02), 1192-1201