



Utilization of ICT Tools to Improve English Language Acquisition among Open and Distance Learners in Opi Community Study Centre, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the use of ICT tools in Improving English Language among Open and Distance learners in Opi community Study Center in Enugu State. The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. Two research purposes and two research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised 251. 16 facilitators and 235 learners in NOUN Opi. The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire, titled, Utilization of ICT Tools to Improve English Language Acquisition among Learners in ODL Questionnaire (UICTELA). The questionnaire was face validated by three experts. Cronbach alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was adopted. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Some findings revealed that ICT tools has great potential to improve the English learning skills of ODL if properly integrated in teaching and learning ,Also, Open Library app enable learners to explore diverse genres and authors, thereby expanding their reading skill. Recommendations are made.

Introduction

English language, which is the Nigeria's lingua franca is a subject taught in Nigerian schools from pre-primary school to the university level. English is compulsory in Nigerian schools especially in secondary schools because it is the language of communication, teaching and learning. Thus, without a credit pass in English language, in both Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and West African Senior Secondary School Examination (WASSSCE) is declared incomplete. According to William (2013), English is the language of worldwide communication. The author emphasized that with 415 million speakers across 12 nations, English is the second most widely spoken language in the world after Mandarin Chinese, which has an estimated 800 million native speakers. Since English is required for interviews on international media, several hundred million people speak English, including most of the world's leaders. The importance of English language, which includes effective communication and its usage in business, makes its acquisition by learners in open eand distance-learning programme important.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) refers to educational programs that are designed to provide learning opportunities to individuals who are not physically present in a traditional classroom setting. ODL leverages various technologies to deliver educational content, facilitate communication between instructors and students, and provide access to resources and support services. Open and distance learning programme is characterised by flexibility, use of technology, and students centered learning. ODL programmes offer flexibility in terms of time and location. Learners can access course materials and complete assignments at their own pace and from any location, making education more accessible for those with personal or professional commitments (Perraton, 2016). Also, ODL relies heavily on digital technologies, including online learning platforms, video conferencing, and digital libraries. These technologies facilitate the delivery of content, interaction between students and instructors, and access to a wide range of resources (Moore & Kearsley, 2015).



Again, ODL promotes a learner-centered approach, where students have greater control over their learning process. This approach accommodates diverse learning styles and paces, enhancing the overall learning experience (Anderson & Dron, 2015).

Learners in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes come from diverse backgrounds and have varied motivations, characteristics, and learning needs. A significant portion of ODL learners are adult learners who seek to enhance their skills, achieve professional development, or change careers. These learners often balance education with work, family, and other responsibilities (Bozkurt, 2019). ODL learners are typically self-motivated and capable of independent study. The absence of a physical classroom requires them to manage their time effectively and take responsibility for their learning (Garrison, 2017). Also, the learners in ODL may have a feeling of isolation since the absence of face-to-face interaction can lead to feelings of isolation among ODL learners. They may miss the social aspects of traditional learning environments, which can impact their motivation and engagement (Keegan, 2016). Therefore, learners in ODL are characterized by life experience, dedication, goal oriented and flexible learning. Since many of them are already engaged in work life and need promotion and improvement in their communications there is need to improve their learning of English language through Information communication technology.

Information and communication technology (ICT) alludes to technologies that allow for telecommunication-based information access, it covers the internet, wireless networks, mobile devices, and other contact channels. Kreijnsa, van Acker, Vermeulend, and van Buuren (2014) defined Information and Communication Technology as a set of tools enabling, supporting, and reinforcing educational reform. In the words of Ratheeswari (2018), Information and communication technology is the computer and internet connections used to handle and communicate information for learning purpose. Furthermore, Ratheeswari emphasised that ICTs are making dynamic changes in society. They are influencing all aspects of life. The influences are felt more and more at schools. Information communication technology can play a key role in the teaching and learning of oral English language. Information and communication technology can cover all the four skills of English language (Listening, Writing, Reading, and speaking). The modern way of teaching-learning process depends on information and communication technology (Mohammed, 2018). Mohammed stressed that ICT has a beneficial influence on students' attitudes towards oral English language learning. Students have a great chance to choose the components that will allow them to fulfill their learning strategies, which the conventional methods were unable to do. The availability of materials such as images, animations, audio, and video clips is very illustrative because it helps learners practice and show a language in novel ways. Hence, the need for the utilization of ICT in learning English language among learners in ODL programme.

Utilization is the effective application of materials or resources for accomplishing a task. Utilization is defined as the effective application of information communication technology (ICT) tools in teaching the language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in English language among learners in ODL programme. Information and Communication Technology tools offer a variety of ways to improve English language speaking skills among learners in ODL programme. Platforms like Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, and Babbel offer interactive lessons in English speaking. These platforms provide structured exercises, pronunciation practice, and real-life scenarios to engage learners actively. A study by Lian (2018) found that learners who used Duolingo significantly improved their English speaking proficiency compared to a control group. Again, Websites like



iTalki, Tandem, and HelloTalk connect learners with native English speakers for language exchange. Learners can engage in real-time conversations, receive feedback, and practice speaking in a natural environment. Research by Ren and Li (2017) demonstrated that language exchange activities facilitated through iTalki led to significant improvements in learners' speaking skills. More so, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality technologies offer immersive environments for language practice. Apps like VRChat and MondlyVR allow learners to interact with virtual avatars or environments, practicing real-life scenarios such as ordering food in a restaurant or giving directions. A study by Lee and Wong (2019) found that learners who used VR-based language learning applications showed significant improvements in speaking fluency and confidence.

Additionally, mobile apps provide convenient and accessible ways for learners in ODL to practice speaking English anytime, anywhere. Apps like Speak English Fluently, ELSA Speak, and Speechling offer personalized feedback on pronunciation and speaking exercises. Research by Hsu and Chiu (2016) demonstrated that consistent use of mobile language learning apps led to improvements in learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. Also, platforms like Reddit, Stack Exchange, and language-specific forums provide spaces for learners to ask questions, share resources, and engage in discussions with other English speakers. Participating in these communities encourages active communication and helps learners gain confidence in speaking English. A study by Liu and Hsu (2015) highlighted the positive impact of online communities on learners' speaking proficiency through peer interaction and feedback. Therefore, ICT tools offer diverse opportunities for learners in ODL programme to enhance their English speaking skills through interactive platforms, virtual environments, mobile apps, and online communities.

Concomitantly, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools improves English language reading skills among learners in ODL. For instance, Interactive e-books and digital libraries provide multimedia-rich content, such as audio narration, animations, and interactive exercises, which cater to different learning styles and preferences (Sung, Chang, & Liu, 2017). These resources allow learners in ODL programme to engage with authentic English texts at their own pace and reinforce comprehension through interactive activities. Also, web-based platforms designed specifically for improving reading comprehension offer a range of texts tailored to different proficiency levels. These platforms often include features like vocabulary support, comprehension questions, and progress tracking (Jeon & Yamashita, 2016). Such platforms enable learners to practice reading in English within a supportive environment, receiving immediate feedback to enhance understanding. Continuing, mobile applications provide convenient access to reading materials anytime, anywhere. Apps like language learning platforms or news aggregators offer a plethora of English articles, stories, and news updates, allowing learners to immerse themselves in authentic English content (Liu & Zhang, 2018).

Additionally, some apps incorporate gamification elements to increase motivation and engagement among learners in ODL. Participating in online discussion forums and social media groups dedicated to English language learning enables learners in ODL programme to practice reading while interacting with peers and native speakers (Hoven & Palalas, 2017). Engaging in discussions on various topics exposes learners to diverse vocabulary, expressions, and cultural nuances, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension skills. Also, Adaptive learning systems utilize algorithms to tailor learning materials and activities based on learners' proficiency levels, learning preferences, and progress (Chen et al., 2019). These systems provide personalized reading experiences by



presenting texts matched to each learner's reading level and offering targeted feedback to address individual learning needs. Therefore, ICT tools offer a diverse range of resources and platforms that can significantly improve English language reading skills among learners in ODL programme through leveraging interactive e-books, online platforms, mobile applications, social media, and adaptive learning systems.

Therefore, since English language is the official language in Nigeria used for communication, trade and commerce, learning it becomes imperative for all and sundry. However, some learners in open and distance learning programme experience difficulty in learning the English language skills reading, and writing. This may be as a result of poor teaching methods or lack of necessary material. Therefore, the need to introduce information communication technology as a means of improving English language acquisition among learners in open and distance learning programme.

Statement of the Problem

English language is the official language in Nigeria used for communication, trade and commerce, learning it becomes imperative for all and sundry. However, many learners in open and distance learning programme experience difficulty in learning the language skills in English language of reading, writing, speaking and listening and this create a barrier between learners and understanding what the teacher taught them.. The utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools seems to be an alternative to bridge the gap. These tools would provide a dynamic and interactive learning environment, facilitating improvements in speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills.

However, the prevailing situation suggests that there might be limited access to ICT tools, inadequate training on their effective utilization, or insufficient integration of these tools into English language learning programmes for learners in ODL programme. As a result, learners in ODL may not be benefiting optimally from the potential advantages that ICT tools offer in language acquisition. Hence, the need to integrate information communication technology in teaching English language acquisition among learners in ODL programme is necessary.

Therefore, the problem of the study is to determine the extent to which ICT tools can be used to improve English language acquisition among learners in National Open University of Nigeria, Opi community study center, Nsukka Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which ICT tools can be use to improve English language acquisition among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which ICT tools has been used to improve speaking skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State.
2. Find out the extent to which ICT tools has been utilised to improve reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State.



Research Questions

The study were guided by the following research questions

1. To what extent has ICT tools been utilized to improve speaking skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria, Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State?
2. To what extent has ICT tools been utilized to improve reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria, Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State?

Methodology

The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. This is because it is fact finding in nature. Descriptive survey aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. These studies are only interested in describing certain variables in relation to the population. (Nworgu, 2015). It is appropriate for this research because its sets to find out the utilization of ICT tools to improve English language acquisition among learners in NOUN Opi community study center, Nsukka, Enugu State. The study was conducted in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. Nsukka L.G.A has its headquarters located at Nsukka town, in the hilly and green sites which Nsukka is known for, close to colonial quarters of the pre-Independence years. .

The researcher chose Nsukka LGA for the study because, despite the presence of NOUN Opi study center in the area, the level to which the learners communicate in English and also understand what is being taught is still low, hence the need to ascertain the utilization of ICT tools to improve the language skills in English language among the learners in NOUN Opi study center. The population of the study comprised 251. 16 facilitators and 235 learners in NOUN Opi community study centre. (NOUN, Opi study center, 2024). The entire population was not sampled because it is manageable and Questionnaire titled Utilization of ICT Tools to Improve English Language Acquisition among Learners in ODL Questionnaire (UICTELA) was used to collect data relevant for the study. The questionnaire was designed for this study by the researcher in line with the two research questions guiding the study. The questionnaire includes two research questions. The respondents were required to tick (✓) at the appropriate options that represented their opinion. Cluster A elicited data on the extent has ICT tools has been utilized to improve speaking skills among learners in NOUN Opi study center with 8-items. Cluster B elicited data on the extent ICT tools has been utilized to improve reading skills among learners in NOUN Opi study center with 6-items. The response mode adopted for the study was: Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points; High Extent (HE) = 3points; Low Extent (LE) = 2points; Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point. The instrument for data collection was validated by 3 experts. 2 from the Departments of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies and one from Science Education, all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to ascertain the relevance of the instrument and its appropriateness to the study. After thorough assessment and corrections, they recommended that it is valid in terms of producing authentic results that will suit the study. The corrections made was used to draft the final copy of the instrument.



To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was carried out by giving out copies of the questionnaire to respondents. 10 facilitators and 15 learners from NOUN Enugu Study centre which is different from Opi community study centre but shares the same experience in terms of job orientation. The reliability co-efficient of 0.76, 0.72, was obtained for clusters A B respectively using Cronbach Alpha Statistical Tool. The researcher with the help of two (2) research assistants who were briefed collected the data for this study on the modalities and techniques to be used in administering the questionnaire to the respondents. The questionnaire was collected immediately to ensure high return. The researcher and her assistants distributed 251 copies of the questionnaire, and all of them were duly filled and returned. This idea is to help ensure high return rate of the instrument. In analysing the data generated from the field, the research question formed the basis for the analysis. The data generated were analysed with mean and standard deviation. After the data analysis, 2.5 above were used as the criterion mean for acceptance. If the calculated mean is 2.5 and above it means that the response item has been accepted otherwise reject.

Presentation of data

Research Question One: To what extent has ICT tools been utilized to improve speaking skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean Responses on the Extent ICT Tools have been Utilized to Improve Speaking Skills among Learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi Community Study Centre.
n=251

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Zoom provide opportunities for learners to engage in real-time speaking practice	2.76	.59	HE
2	Skype provides simulations for face-to-face communication	2.88	.51	HE
3	Google Meet provides a supportive environment for learners to practice conversational English	2.63	.62	HE
4	Video chat connects language learners with native speakers for language exchange sessions	2.68	.58	HE
5	Virtual reality offer opportunities for learner to practice speaking English in virtual environments	3.74	.43	HE
6	Google Speech-to-Text provides instant feedback on pronunciation and intonation for learners.	3.89	.30	HE
7	Smart phones offer daily speaking exercises for learners	3.55	.65	HE
8	Virtual language lab software allows learners to record and playback the language of interest.	3.45	.65	HE
Grand Mean		3.19	0.54	HE

Table 1 showed the mean responses on the extent ICT tools has been utilized to improve speaking skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center. From the table, the mean ranges from $M = 2.63 - 3.89$. This showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent ICT tools has been utilized to improve speaking skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State.



Research Question Two: To what extent has ICT tools been utilized to improve reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Extent ICT Tools have been utilized to Improve Reading Skills among Learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi Community Study Center.
n=251

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
9	Read theory app provides personalized reading materials tailored to the proficiency level and interests of learners	3.16	.55	HE
10	Google Play Books allow learners to read at their own pace and customize their reading experience	3.62	.48	HE
11	Internet Archive provides materials with features like highlighting, note-taking, and built-in dictionaries	3.24	.44	HE
12	Open Library app enables learners to explore diverse genres and authors, thereby expanding their reading skill.	3.41	.85	HE
13	Voice Dream Reader app allows learners to listen to digital texts while following along with the written words	3.10	.51	HE
14	Goodreads and Library app facilitate virtual book clubs and reading groups where learners can learn more from their peers	3.65	.47	HE
Grand Mean		3.36	0.55	HE

Table 2 revealed the mean responses on the extent ICT tools been utilized to improve reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center. The table showed that the means responses range between $M = 3.10 - 3.65$. This showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent ICT tools has been utilized to improve reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State.

Discussion of Findings

This study showed that ICT tools highly improve the speaking skill of ODL in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State. This is because Zoom provide opportunities for learners to engage in real-time speaking practice. Skype provides simulatations for face-to-face communication. Google Meet provides a supportive environment for learners to practice conversational English. This finding is in agreement with Chun (2016) who noted that various online platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet, offer opportunities for adult learners to engage in real-time speaking practice with instructors or peers. These platforms simulate face-to-face communication and provide a supportive environment for learners to practice conversational English. Further the study showed that video chat connects language learners with native speakers for language exchange sessions. Virtual reality offers opportunities for learner to practice speaking English in virtual environment. Google Speech-to-Text provides instant feedback on pronunciation and intonation for learners. Smart phones offer daily speaking exercises for learners; and virtual language lab software allows learners to record and playback the language of interest. This finding supported by Bakla (2016) who stated that tools like Speech Recognition and Google Speech-to-Text convert spoken language into text, providing instant feedback on pronunciation and intonation for adult learners. These tools allow learners to identify and correct



pronunciation errors, thereby improving their speaking skills Apps like ELSA Speak, Speak English Fluently, and Speak English Daily offer speaking exercises, pronunciation drills, and dialogues for adult learners to practice speaking English anytime, anywhere using their smartphones (Li & Vasilakos, 2017).

In addition, the study showed that ICT tools highly improves reading skills among learners in National Open University of Nigeria Opi community study center in Nsukka, LGA Enugu State . This is because read theory app provides personalized reading materials tailored to the proficiency level and interests of learners. Google Play Books allow learners to read at their own pace and customize their reading experience. Internet Archive provides materials with features like highlighting, note-taking, and built-in dictionaries. This is in agreement with Tao and Sheu (2018) that Read Theory, and Read Works, offer a wide range of leveled reading passages accompanied by comprehension questions and interactive activities. These platforms provide personalized reading materials tailored to the proficiency level and interests of adult learners. E-book readers like Kindle and e-reader apps such as Apple Books and Google Play Books offer access to a vast library of digital books, allowing adult learners to read at their own pace and customize their reading experience with features like highlighting, note-taking, and built-in dictionaries (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018).

Further, the study showed that Open Library app enables learners to explore diverse genres and authors, thereby expanding their reading skill. Voice Dream Reader app allows learners to listen to digital texts while following along with the written words; and Goodreads and Library app facilitate virtual book clubs and reading groups where learners can learn more from their peers. Text-to-speech software, such as Natural Reader and Voice Dream Reader, convert written text into audio, allowing adult learners to listen to digital texts while following along with the written words. Similarly, audiobook services like Audible provide access to professionally narrated books, enhancing accessibility and comprehension for readers with diverse learning preferences (Wylie & Coyne, 2016).

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, its crystal clear that ICT APPS has great potential to improve the English learning skills of ODL if properly integrated in teaching and learning It will also make it easy for the learners to understand other courses being taught in class and also make communication easy for both facilitators and learners..

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need to facilitate ongoing professional development programmes to train facilitators on the effective use of ICT tools for teaching writing and listening skills. This can include workshops, seminars, and online courses focusing on integrating ICT into language instruction.
2. Also, there is need to encourage the sharing of best practices among facilitators through collaborative platforms and regular meetings. Facilitators who have successfully integrated ICT tools for speaking and reading can share their strategies and experiences.



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