

Digital Literacy and Language Learning of Undergraduates

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Abstract: *This paper reports on the impact of digital technologies on language skills of undergraduates in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The purpose is to find out if modern communication tools have any impact on language learning of undergraduates. The study was a descriptive research. A sample of two hundred students from three faculties of the university formed the target sample. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. It finds that undergraduates utilize ICTs and it impacted on their learning and communication skills, although it was shocking to know that there were undergraduates who do not utilize ICTs facilities at all. It further finds that a high percentage of students perceive themselves utilizing English Language more in communicating than their mother tongues. Finding also shows that Faculties of undergraduates had no influence on their ICTs' application. The implication on mother tongue development and utilization were also explained.*

Keywords: *ICTs, Language skills, Undergraduates, Gender, Digital literacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning is an everyday affair. It sometimes occurs subconsciously and deliberately because it involves learning about new ways of thinking, feeling and skills. The primary means of learning a language are the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and speaking have been regarded as oracy skills. These two skills are primary in the learning process because of their indispensability in the communicative process. On the other hand, reading and writing are derivative of both listening and speaking. Reading and writing are higher order skill because they are acquired or learnt through formal education. Volumes of information are transmitted, communicated and documented through these skills. Within the university system, reading and writing have become the most potential means by which undergraduates are informed and the potent materials for effective studies are books, journals and reference materials. The dearth of relevant reading materials in many universities today especially in Africa poses a great challenge to effective studies and this explains why students depend primarily on Internet resources (Oladele, 2009).

One form of language learning common among the literate class recently is e-learning or digital literacy. Digital forms of communication often referred to collectively as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have entered the mainstream of everyday literacy and life generally (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) refers to computers, ancillary equipment software, hardware, services and resources interconnected together to form networks that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information. The diffusion and usage of these ICTs have modified the ways, means and skills of language learning. Today, there are new genres of reading and writing such as online chats (face books, twitter), blogs, wikis and emails.

Hutchison & Reinking (2011) assert that ICTs provide unique affordances for reading and writing and failure to integrate ICTs appropriately into instruction risks leaving today's generation of students unprepared for mainstream reading and writing activities that are increasingly prominent in and out of academic contexts.

ICTs facilitates effective teaching and learning as the rate of students over-reliance on teachers have drastically reduced, with the aid of ICT, teachers can take students beyond the traditional limits, ensure their adequate participation, interaction and fast track the learning process without much ado. ICTs widen the range of materials that can be used in teaching and learning. It allows teacher with different teaching styles to modify materials and the way they are used in different ways. It serves as tools for educational management and higher technological development (Ajayi& Ekundayo, 2010).

One can develop one's ICT skills and knowledge and study subjects probably not covered by one's main degree through ICTs. Many students find this rewarding and those who have recently gained jobs report that their ICTs skills enabled them to secure successful interviews leading to employment (Exeter University, 2011).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Watson, Proctor, Finger & Lang (2004) asserted that it is well understood that university graduates, regardless of discipline, must have appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) competencies to function and be employable in the modern world. Universities have been encouraged to develop action plans for ICT literacy and to introduce means of auditing ICT literacy levels of students. In addition, education graduates have had additional responsibility to develop ICT competencies to support student learning. The extent to which this is actually being achieved is less well understood. In their paper, they reported on one aspect of a project designed to inform the integration of ICTs within undergraduate programs for the preparation of primary and secondary teachers at an Australian university. Initially survey data were collected that explored the students' competence with ICT applications and their confidence with ICT integration in their teaching pedagogy. This paper reports on interviews with students to provide in-depth understanding of their ICT experiences as undergraduates. It supports survey findings that considerable difference exists between individual experiences within and between programs depending on course selection, study plans and personal inclination. It also raises serious questions about the capacity of many graduates to undertake ICT aspects of their profession without extensive and immediate further professional development. The paper concludes by exploring how some of this variance can be addressed to ensure that graduates are more ICT capable.

Olatunji and Kolawole (2008) investigated the level of exposure of pre-service teachers to computers by Nigerian universities in their teacher preparation programmes so that such pre-service teachers become computer literate and skillful in its use in the teaching and learning of English Language at the secondary school level. This is because the status of English as both a compulsory subject and the language of instruction at the secondary school level in Nigeria make it imperative that teachers use devices that can improve its teaching and help to reduce the problem of mass failure in it. But information available indicates that teachers and students do not utilize computers in the teaching and learning of English because the teachers themselves were not exposed to the use of computers during their preparation. The implication of this is that something drastic has to be done to improve the quality of teachers being prepared by our universities if they are expected to be able to cope with the challenges of teaching this important subject successfully at the secondary school level and beyond. Based on his, appropriate recommendations on what have to be done to improve the computer knowledge and skills of secondary school teachers of English has been made in the body of the paper.

Ofodu (2012) examined Internet use and reading habits of higher institution students in Ekiti State. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research method. The population for the study consists of one state university, one private university and a federal polytechnic. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample that was used for the study. 266 higher institution first year students were randomly selected from the population. This cut across all disciplines ranging from arts to science to engineering and social sciences, inclusive of both sexes. The survey instrument was a questionnaire titled 'Internet use and reading habits of higher institution students in Ekiti state'. All data were analyzed using simple percentages. Finding revealed that a large percentage of the respondents generally enjoy reading and it could be safely said that the reading culture of the students is favourable since the advent of internet. It also

reveals that large number respondents actually engage in activities that may not add value to their academic performance.

While commenting on the impact of modern communication tools on students of tertiary institutions, Ajayi (2010) asserts that many students focus on extra curricula activities at the expense of their academics. He added that in most cases, they hardly read except during examination.

However, the impact of ICTs on language learning experiences of undergraduates has not been investigated especially in Nigeria, and this necessitated this investigation.

Research and experience have revealed that undergraduates have poor language and communication skills which are evidenced in their everyday conversation, poor listening ability, reading, faulty academic write-ups and general performance in assignments, term papers, tests and examination (Ofodu, 2012). This researcher feels that since ICTs seem to be one means by which many students are connected to the global happenings, it may have some significant influence on their language learning and probably assist in their academic and language learning abilities.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to find out how ICTs has influenced the language skills of undergraduates. Specifically, it examines the extent of impact of ICTs on undergraduates in terms of language skills. It also finds out whether any difference will exist between male and female undergraduates' language learning and the language they often use in communicating.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive survey of (N=200) undergraduates (Male=69) and (Female=131). All undergraduates of the Ekiti State University formed the population but the target sample was students of the Faculties of Arts, Science and Education. They were deliberately sampled because they seem to be very close to the University computer center and various cybercafés located in the campus. A questionnaire containing three sections was used to gather data. The first section elicited information on the bio data of the respondents, the second section dealt with information on the influence of language learning with three items on the frequency with the students' utility level. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, chi-square and t-test statistics and they are presented as follows.

4. RESULTS

Table1. Bio- data of Respondents

Bio-data	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	69	34.5
	Female	131	65.5
	Total	200	100.00
Faculty	Arts	50	25.0
	Science	61	30.0
	Education	89	44.5
	Total	200	100.0

The results of the bio-data shows that 69 (34.5%) of the total sample were male while 131 (65.5%) were female, 50 (25.0%) of the respondents were from the Faculty of Arts, 61 (30.5%) were from the Sciences while 89 (44.5%) were from the Faculty of Education.

4.1 Research Question 1

How has Information Communication Technology (ICT) influenced the language skills of undergraduates?

Table 2 shows that 47.5% very frequently received calls, 42% frequently received calls, 10% rarely received call while only 5% did not receive call at all. Responses on item 2 reveals that 42% very frequently engaged in calling people while 49% frequently do and 9% rarely engage in calling people. In item 3, 29% very frequently surf the net,37% do frequently and 30.5% rarely and only 3.5% do not at all.

Table 2. Influence of ICT on language skills of undergraduates

Item	Very Frequency	Frequently	Rarely	Not at all	X2cal
How often do you receive calls?	95 47.5	84 42	2.0 10.0	1 5	126.640
How often do you engage in calling people using your handset?	84 42.0	98 49.0	18 9.0	- -	54.760
How often do you browse?	58 29.0	72 37.0	61 30.5	7 3.5	52.200

$P < 0.05$, $df = 3$, $\chi^2 = 7.814$,

Report of the χ^2 , cal were 126.6, 54.8 and 52.2 respectively while the corresponding table value at 0.05 level of significant was 7.81. Since the calculated value was greater than χ^2 tab. This implies that there was a significant association.

4.2 Research Question 2

What significant impact do Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities have on undergraduates' learning skills?

Table3. Impact of ICT facilities on learning skills of undergrad duates.

Items	High F	%	Average F	%	Low F	%	Very Low F	%	X ₂ Cal
To what extent have you been using computer for learning	63	31.5	87	8.5	43.5	37	18.5	13	61.520
To what extent has the computer literacy assist you in learning new words?	142	71.0	47	23.5	7	3.5	4	2.0	248.760
To what extent has computer literacy assisted your reading ability?	123	61.5	64	32.0	11	5.5	2	1.0	187.000
To what extent has computer Literacy assisted your writing ability?	114	57.0	64	32.0	16	8.0	6	3.0	147.680

$Df = 3$, $\chi^2 = 7.814$

Table 3 shows that 63(31.5%) of the sample have been using computer for learning to a high extent, 87 (8.5%) to an average extent while 43.5 (37%) to a low extent . 142 (71%) indicated that computer literacy had assisted in learning new words to a great extent, 47 (23.5%) average extent while 7 (3.5%) low extent.It was indicated that computer literacy has assisted students' ability to read to a great extent 123 (61.5%). 64(32%) average extent while 13 (6.5%). The last question in

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the above table shows that computer literacy had assisted in writing to a great extent 64(32%) average extent while 22 (11%) low extent.

The report of the chi-square on the table were 61.520, 248.760. 187.000 and 147.680 respectively while the corresponding table value at 0.05 level of significance was 7.81. Since the calculated value was greater than the χ^2 tabulated. This implies that there was a significant association between the two.

4.3 Research Question 3

Will any difference exist in language use in calling among undergraduates?

Table 4. Language use in calling among undergraduates

Item	ENG		FRENCH		YOR		ENG/YOR		IGBO		HAUSA		X ² CAL
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
What language do you often use while calling?													207.760
Df = 5, χ^2 table=11.070	104	52.0	19	9.5	26	13.0	41	20.5	7	3.5	3	1.5	

Table 4 shows that 104 (52%) of respondents make use of English in calling, 19 (9.5%) make use of French language in calling, 26 (13.0%) use Yoruba language to communicate while calling, 41 (20.5%) use both English and Yoruba in calling, 7(3.5%) make use of Igbo language in calling while 3 (1.5%) use Hausa language to communicate while calling. X² cal (207.60) is greater than X² table (11.070) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the type of language used in calling among undergraduates. The report of the chi-square in table 4 is 207.760, the level of significant was 11.7, since the calculated value is greater than the χ^2 tabulated. This implies that there was a significant association.

5. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

1. Will there be any difference in the utilization ICTs for language learning between male and female undergraduates?

Table 5. T-test comparison the utilization of ICT of male and female undergraduates.

Group	Male	Female
N	69	131
X	55.34	53.95
SD	6.36	6.47
Df	198	
Tcal	2.070	
T table	1.960	

P < 0.05

Table 5 shows that t-cal (2.070) is greater than t-table (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is significant difference in the utilization of (ICT) between male and female undergraduates. It is shown that the male students utilize ICT than the female students.

2. Will there be any difference among undergraduates' faculties and the use of ICT facilities in language learning?

Table 6. One way ANOVA summary showing faculties and use of ICT facilities

Source	Ss	Df	MS	Fcal	Ftable
Between	30.208	2	15.104		

Groups					
Within Groups	8342.412	97	42.347	0.357	3.04
	8372.620	199			

Table 6 shows that $F_{cal} (.357)$ is less than F table (3.04) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is no significant difference among undergraduate’s facilities and the use of ICT facilities in language learning.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Influence of ICTs on language skills of undergraduates

The data provided under this research question indicated that a vast majority of undergraduates utilized the ICT facilities that enable them to speak and listen to information and thereby influencing their capacity for language learning. Speaking English as a second language in all countries where English is a second language has remained a hard it for students to communicate effectively in English. ICTs facilities makes for easier communication in English, the students have to chat, write and then talk mindless of grammatical mistakes. The discomfort many undergraduates experience in speeches and writing are all avoided and overcome by means of these facilities at their disposal. When undergraduates talk to students having a reasonably good command over the English Language, they listen and are influenced by their peer group who is speaking fluently.

Responses on the frequency of surfing the Internet showed that many do but surprisingly many of them do not surf the net. This is not too good for undergraduates who are supposed to be researchers since there is dearth of relevant reading materials in many universities and this explains why students depend primarily on Internet resources (Oladele, 2009).

6.2 Impact of ICTs on undergraduates’ learning skills

The analysis here showed that undergraduates utilized the computer for learning to a high extent, learning new words to a great extent. It was indicated that ICTs has assisted students’ ability to read and write to a great extent.

The result also indicated that there are some undergraduates who do not utilize the net at all. This is not surprising as the economy of the 21st century is a lifelong learning culture that should encourage the undergraduates to improve his or her skills. For those who do not utilize ICTs despite this usefulness, it is necessary to state that knowledge changes every day and to rely on books for current information may be tantamount to reliance on obsolete knowledge. It is only the web or the Internet that can carry cutting edge knowledge to undergraduates in good time much faster than books (Ofodu, 2007; Daramola, 2007).

6.3 Language use in calling among undergraduates

The findings revealed that most undergraduates use the English Language in communicating. This is in line probably with the fact that it is the lingua franca of the country as well as the mother tongue of many youths. This has great implication on the mother of many minorities whose languages may eventually go into extinction due to lack of use by the young ones. This finding was closely followed by those who code switch English and Yoruba languages simultaneously. This is very common among undergraduates as many prefer to code switch or code mix these two languages in everyday conversations.

6.4 Utilization ICTs for language learning between male and female undergraduates

The findings indicated a significant difference in the utilization of ICTs between male and female undergraduates. It is shown that the male students utilize ICT than the female students. The reason for this difference may be because many girls prefer reading to browsing and they may not have the ability to visit cybercafés at will unlike male students who could spend a fortune on anything. Again, the reason may be because many male students have flare for science oriented activities especially manipulative skills which may have little or no interest to many females.

6.5 Undergraduates' faculties and the use of ICT facilities in language learning

The result showed that there was no significant difference among undergraduates' faculties and the use of ICT facilities in language learning. This is quite revealing because one would have taught undergraduates in the Faculty of Science would have more interest in using ICTs but the finding did not support this. More so, the students in the Faculties of Arts and Education who could probably be said to dislike these facilities were not left out. This supports the fact that we are really in knowledge based society where the driving force is knowledge, information and technology.

7. CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study have shown that ICTs have influenced learning, language skills and effective utilization of the English language in communication. Although some undergraduates do not use ICTs, yet the vast majority of them do. The result also informed the university authority especially lecturers who have observed noticed some undergraduates with language and communication problems to assist them on the how to translate the usefulness of the Internet into their own lifestyle and language development skills. The result also emphasized the fact that the course of an undergraduate does not have any impact on the utility of ICTs. It is for all and sundry. It is believe that despite any caveat this study might have, it advances the extent to which ICTs have impacted undergraduates' language learning and skills. Further studies could be embarked on the integration of ICTs in secondary schools.

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