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Teachers' Use of Mobile Technologies in Creating an Effective Feedback System in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper surveyed teachers' use of mobile technologies to create an effective feedback system in ESL classrooms in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve two main objectives: (a) to investigate the perceptions of ESL teachers on using mobile technologies. (b) to find out the extent to which teachers use mobile technologies for feedback. In order to achieve these objectives, purposive sampling technique was used to select sixty teachers of English language from the population that included all the senior secondary school teachers in Ekiti North, Nigeria. The data collection was done using questionnaire. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyse research question 1 while research question 2 was analysed using frequency counts and percentage. The findings revealed that though the teachers were positive on using mobile technologies devices for learning and feedback in classroom, a greater number of them do not use the devices in classroom for teaching and feedback. The study therefore recommended among others that teachers should improve on their personal digital literacies and also that the government and school administrators should provide internet and other facilities that could encourage language teachers to use mobile technologies in their pedagogical activities especially for effective feedback system in ESL classrooms in Nigeria.

Key words: Mobile technologies, feedback, ESL classroom

1. Introduction

In typical English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms in Africa and especially in Nigeria, there are myriads of challenges facing the Language teaching and learning. Adeniyi (2011) observes such problems to include, but not limited to inadequate use of appropriate instructional methods, lack of relevant instructional resources, overpopulation, inadequate human power especially language specialists, government inconsistent policies, lack of conducive learning environment, mother tongue interference and most important, lack of effective feedback in the classroom. Giving feedback in the classroom during the learning process has been proven to be a powerful source of motivation to students and an improvement to their learning outcomes and this can be effectively carried out through the use of innovative technology.

Over a few decades now, innovations in technology have continuously evolved. The continuous evolvement in technology is not without corresponding innovations in pedagogical practices, especially in the teaching and learning of English language, especially considering the fact that English is mainly the language of technology. Technology has brought about several changes in man's thinking processes and this has culminated into modifications in human activities including the teaching and learning situations. Technology has brought about continuous modifications of human practices and pedagogical practices are not exempted from these nuances. As technology continues to dominate human practices, pedagogical approaches need to develop more radically (Savage, 2010). Technology has been identified to be of tremendous importance to instructional practices (Northrop and Killeen, 2013; Chen and Denoyelles 2013; Celik 2013; Yeung, and Tilffany 2016). There is hardly any aspect of instructional practice (ranging from planning, implementation, evaluation and feedback) today that does not need technology to thrive.

English language and its instructional practices became more popular as the influence of technology began to grow. The reason for this is not far-fetched. English is the major language of technology. The development of the Internet has social, economic, cultural and linguistic influences on English language (Celik, 2013). This is more so given that mobile technologies are more accessible and easier to use. With mobile technologies – l pads, tabs, mobile phones and the

likes, technology could be said to be resident in many households. Teachers that hitherto did not have access to technological facilities for instructional practices can now take advantage of the mobile technologies. These devices which are mainly used for interpersonal communications have also been identified to be veritable resources for instruction. There is therefore a need to encourage teachers to reflect on the relevance of their personal digital literacies, to consider how their attitudes towards new possibilities could be improved to enhance their professional activities. According to Burnett (2011), if progress is to be made in investigating and developing pedagogies that capitalize on the potentials of new technologies, greater consideration needs to be given to how teachers experience digital literacy practices across different domains of their lives. The implication of this stance is that researchers should probe on the teachers' personal use of these devices and fashion out how its pedagogical gains can be harnessed.

2. Mobile Technologies in ESL Classroom

Mobile technologies are increasingly becoming suitable and friendly to the learning process. For many of today's students, the advancement of creative ideas and sharing of information occur through informal and formal discussions fostered by some form of technology integrated into the classroom instruction (Miller, 2018). Because technology makes the learning process more learner-centred, it gives the learners room to self-think on ideas that will improve their learning. According to Gallagher and Ciampa (2013), mobile technologies, Ipad for instance is instrumental in creating inclusive learning environments that engage all students regardless of ability, disability or background. Mobile technologies become more useful in the classroom through recontextualization –change in field by transferring from its original site to pedagogical practice and restructuring of the instructional approaches (Dela Pledra & Araujo, 2012; Jacobs, 2010). The adaption of mobile technologies in the classroom portends that certain conventions or beliefs be dropped. Using these technologies therefore demands a philosophical flexibility. It is time for teachers to shift their mindsets away from the notion that technology provides supplemental teaching tool and assume, as with other professions that technology is essential to successful performance outcomes. Anne and Ottenbreit, (2010)

maintain that normally when teachers are asked to use technology to facilitate learning, some degree of change is required along any or all the following dimensions: (a) beliefs, attitudes or pedagogical ideologies; (b) content (c) pedagogical practices, strategies, methods or approaches (d) novel or altered instructional resources or materials.

In the ESL classroom, technologies provide access to authentic materials for all language skills which serve as a synergy between the classroom and the learning community. Achike (2016) however notes that it is pertinent that authentic materials are adapted to suit the learners. The effectiveness of these materials is sometimes environmentally determined. To use technology to support meaningful student learning, teachers need additional knowledge of the content they are required to teach, the pedagogical methods and the specific ways in which technology can support those methods that facilitate students learning and the specific ways in which technology can support those methods (Anne and Ottenbreit 2010, Savage 2010, Golonka, Bowles, Freank, Richardson and Freynik 2014). On the contrary, we do know, learning about technologies is like chasing the wind. What ESL/EFL teachers need do is to start with their little experience from using these technologies for personal purposes and develop their own instructional models. Most importantly, their negative perceptions about these technologies have to change.

As technologies mature, become readily available, and are adapted for L2 or FL pedagogy, instructors may alter their teaching strategies or adjust their teaching activities to most effectively utilize the available resources (Golonka et al 2014). This is especially important because mobile technologies or any other technologies are not the change agents in isolation. Technologies without the teachers' use have little or no instructional output on the learners.

A critical instructional practice that owes much of its effectiveness to mobile technology is feedback. Feedback is a very essential aspect of teaching and learning practice (Kamiya, 2016). In the words of Lee, Cheung, Wong and Lee (2013), a web-based essay critiquing system provides immediate, continual and personalized computer-support feedback on essay content. This immediate and continual practice in the technological feedback system to a great extent ensures a significant improvement on the students' performance as feedback heralds.

3. Feedback in ESL Classroom

Tests and examinations conventionally evaluate students' learning outcome. However, for instructional process to be learner-centred, it is important to continually monitor students' progress and give them feedback. Feedback when correctly used is a huge source of motivation to the students which helps them learn more efficiently. Consequently, monitoring students' learning processes demands teacher 'awareness and control' (or metacognition) of his/her own teaching.

According to Hattie and Temperly (2007), feedback is the information provided by an agent (e.g teacher, peer, book, parent or self -experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding that reduces the discrepancy between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood. It is those moments of contingencies, that is a critical point where learning changes direction depending on an assessment (Black and William, 2009). Wrongly, feedback has been associated largely with error correction, but that is only one reason for its use. Equally important is the opportunity it gives the teacher to praise learners for effective language use, and discuss how well they achieved their communicative goals and contributed on a personal level (Kwong, 2001).

In typical ESL classroom, Ellis (2012) conceptualizes feedback approaches in two dimensions. First, feedback techniques are either input providing (i.e the teacher provides the correct language form, such as a word or phrase for the child) or output prompting (i.e the teacher prompts the child to self-correct his/her utterance). Second, feedback strategies can be placed on a continuum from explicit (i.e the teacher's correction is overt) to implicit (i.e the teacher's correction is covert). Cheatham, Jimenez-Silva & Park (2015) also grouped feedback strategies in an oral language class into implicit and explicit feedback. Under implicit feedback, teachers can adopt strategies but not limited to recasts, repetition and clarification requests, while explicit feedback involves a direct feedback (i.e teacher explicitly stating the correct language, highlighting on the learner's mistake) and elicitation (a form of output prompting to make the learner correct him/herself.). Feedback can be directive or facilitative. Directive feedback gives specific information about what needs to be changed or revised, while facilitative feedback provides

comments and suggestions to help guide learners in their own revision (Gemlem and Smith 2013). Both of these forms are important. However, pointing out a particular error without giving a clear guide on how to help the learners improve on it may be less effective. On any perspective that one classifies feedback from, it is said to be effective only when it defines the direction for learning.

According to Rogers (2001), for feedback to be effective, it should take cognizance of the following:

- be prompt (i.e. closely following the event)
- contain encouragement
- be specific about why something was good or was not up to standard and what the student can do about it
- not focus on too many different aspects at the same time
- be unambiguous and clear.

Researchers point out that feedback leads to learning gains only when it includes guidance about how to improve; when students have opportunities to use it and are willing to dedicate effort (Hattie and Timperly, 2007). And this is exactly what mobile technology does when effectively put to use. Gemelem and Smith (2013) quip that teachers, peers and self-experience are the agents of feedback. Mobile technology therefore creates a platform devoid of tension to provide information about the quality of the work and advice about how further performances or future responses to similar assessment tasks should be tackled.

Feedback is quite an indispensable instructional practice (Kamiya 2016). It ideally finds itself at the nucleus of all instructional processes. From planning to evaluation, feedback mediates to give the needed interaction through which learning is modified. Ideally, students need a continuous guide from the teacher on how to go about improving their learning. Getting a grade with no comments is understood by students as useless and does not contribute to further learning (Gemlem and Smith, 2013). Technology especially the mobile technologies is a veritable resource for creating an effective feedback system especially in learning English as a second language. The embedded services like Web 2.0 (e.g. facebook, WhatsApp, twitter etc) in the mobile technologies make the teacher to be at ease

in doing the necessary follow up to ensure the experiential learning (attempts of the learners based on their own experiences) of the students are modified.

Another consideration for choosing the mobile technologies for effective feedback system is the gain of effective time management. Technologies give teachers convenience to operate from any location thereby making up for the limited time in the classroom.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study specifically intends to:

- investigate the perceptions of teachers on using mobile technologies for ESL lessons,
- determine the extent to which teachers use mobile technologies for feedback.

5. Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, it has to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of teachers in using mobile technologies?
- To what extent do teachers use mobile technologies for feedback?

6. Methodology

The study is a survey conducted using purposive sampling technique to select sixty teachers of English language at the senior secondary schools in Ekiti North, Nigeria. The data collection was done using questionnaire. The questionnaire is a combination of seven structured questions. Each of the participants filled and returned the questionnaire immediately.

7. Data Analysis Technique

Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyse research question 1, while research question 2 was analysed using frequency counts and percentage.

Research Question 1: what are the Perceptions of teachers in using mobile technologies?

Table 1: Perceptions of Teachers on the Use of Mobile Technologies for Teaching

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
The use of Ipad	3.52	.89
The use of Tablet	3.33	.81
The use of Mobile Phone	1.50	.68
The mobile device is wrong	2.07	1.25
With teachers' guidance mobile devices are beneficial for teaching and learning	3.63	1.56

Table 3: The Extent to which teachers use mobile technologies of Ipad, Tablets and Mobile Phone for feedback

Item	Very Often		Often		Rarely		Never	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
How often do you use Ipad, Tablet and mobile phone?	19	31.7	2	3.3	2	3.3	37	61.7
How frequent do you use the mobile devices for instructional purposes?	11	18.3	14	23.3	9	15	26	43.3
Are you always comfortable with the use of the devices?	40	66.7	16	26.7	4	6.7	0	0
Are mobile technology strategic for effective feedback	18	30	25	41.7	5	8.3	12	20

Table 3 showed the responses of teachers on the extent to which they use mobile devices, most especially, Ipad, Tablets and mobile phones, for teaching and learning process including feedback. 19 (31.7%) of the respondents submitted that they make use of the devices very often, 02 (3.3%) said they use it often, 02 (3.3%) used it rarely while the greater number of them which is 37 (61.7%) concurred that they do not use it at all. 11 (18.3%) of the respondents said they frequently use the devices for instructional purposes very often, 14 (23.3%) submitted that they use it often, 09 (15%) said they rarely use it while 26 (43.3%) which is the highest percentage of the respondents said they are not using it for instructional purposes. 40 (66%) of the respondents agreed that they are comfortable with the use of the devices very often, 16 (26.7%) concurred that the comfortability of the use of the device is often, 04 (6.7%) said they are rarely comfortable with its use. 18 (30%) of the respondents submitted that the use of mobile devices is very strategic for effective feedback, 25 (41.7%) said it is often strategic for feedback, 05 (8.3%) agreed that it is rarely strategic for effective feedback in classroom while 12 (20%) submitted that it is not strategic for the necessary feedback needed in classroom during teaching-learning process.

The results indicated that high numbers of the respondents who are teachers do not use mobile devices in classroom for teaching and feedback. The greater number of those using it is comfortable with its use in classroom for teaching and feedback. Equally, the highest percentage of them submitted that the use of mobile technologies for feedback is strategic for teaching and feedback in classroom.

8. Discussion

As found in this study, teachers are conversant with these mobile devices. However, it is found out that they are for personal uses and not necessarily instructional purposes. This may not be unconnected to the poor knowledge of the teachers on the learning apps on these devices. Downloaded Ipad apps are facilitative of differentiated learning because of many setting features (Gallagher and Ciampa 2013). When teachers are not knowledgeable of these downloaded apps, there is little they can do to use the devices to facilitate learning. Again, accessibility is another serious concern. In many of the schools, students do not have access to these mobile technologies,

let alone at home. Gallagher and Ciampa (2013) acknowledge this concern by quipping that the fact that some students could not use the mobile technology like the Ipad and its apps outside the classroom because of their family's financial situation and this is an important dimension of the digital divide.

Also, the issue of distractions brought about by these mobile technologies into the classroom could be a serious discouraging factor to teachers. From pedagogical perspective, distractions attributed to mobile device use in the classroom can lead to negative learning -related outcomes (Kuznekeff and Titsworth, 2013). This makes it difficult for some teachers to change from their traditional perspective of teaching and learning, to embracing a more nuanced approach, like using the mobile technologies.

Consequently, the visible limitation on the teachers' use of the mobile devices for instruction is also linked to poor knowledge of the learning apps associated with these devices. There is therefore a threatening loophole on creating an effective feedback system. One does not but wonders the extent of damage being done by failure to implement communicative language teaching as the mobile technologies enhance.

9. Conclusion

In redefining instructional practice, mobile technology is a formidable integration, not just because of its portability, but also for its affordability. In language teaching, it supports those proactive approaches like communicative language teaching, sociocultural perspective and even constructive approaches because it makes the learners the major focus. However, it remains a fact that there is a sort of digital divide that limits harnessing the gains of these mobile technologies in some parts of the world. While advanced countries are consistently advancing on the integration of these technologies in their pedagogical practices, a conscientious effort has to be made to encourage developing countries to be more proactive in their technological advancement.

10. Recommendations

The findings from this study indicate that although teachers of English language have positive attitudes towards using mobile technologies, they hardly use it for teaching and learning purposes,

especially for feedback. It is therefore recommended that teachers should specifically develop the skills and interest in using mobile apps for instructional purposes most especially for effective feedback. Government and school administrators should provide internet facilities to encourage language teachers to use mobile technologies in their pedagogical activities.

Researchers in recent years have significantly highlighted on the gains of using mobile technologies in the classroom. But conspicuous gaps still exist on how these technologies can be used to implement specific instructional levels, especially evaluation and feedback. Researchers should therefore beam more research light on these aspects as to complement this present study.

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