

Digital Technologies in Teacher Education With Reference to French Language Teacher

Ganiyat Omotola Adeniran, Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta, Nigeria

The Barcelona Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2022
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper examines digital technologies in teacher education with reference to French language teacher. The purpose was to find whether digital technologies can be used by teachers to teach French language. First, there is need for the education sector to adopt digital technologies to teach in the classrooms. Secondly, it has been observed that learning of any foreign language require the use of language laboratory well equipped with all the technology tools such as computers, radio, television etc. and perhaps digital technology could play a vital role in teaching and learning French language. Secondary data was used to gather information for the study, through in-depth review of journals, articles, textbooks and research materials offline and online in search of how digital technologies can be used by French teachers to enhance the learning and teaching of French language. In-depth studies of researchers on the use of digital technologies by both teachers and students reveals that it allows students to be much better prepared for class, and provides teachers with attractive resources to make their classes much more human and sociable, where all students have the opportunity to participate regardless of their level. Based on this, it is recommended that teachers and students should acquire efficient knowledge and skills on how to make use of digital technologies for teaching and learning. Teachers and students should be provided with the necessary tools and equipments required for the achievement of the goals by relevant authority.

Keywords: Digital Technology, Teacher Education, French Language

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Introduction

In this present world, the use of digital technologies has become very important and understanding as they are being seriously used by individuals in various sectors. Digital technologies create an impact upon what, why, where and how the individuals learn and who they learn from. The widespread use of digital technologies is in the form of computers, laptops, tablets, smart phones, mobile phones and so forth (Kapur, 2018). The primary objective of digital technology is to create a platform where people can connect with one another seamlessly. Today digital technology has transformed the way people communicate, work and learn in the society. People are linked to one another with the help of digital gadgets. We have several advantages of learning through digital technologies and at the same time have some disadvantages in education. According to (Digital Technology, 2015) cited by Kapur, 2018, “the digital challenges are real and prove to be impediments within the course of attainment of knowledge and information. Measures are required to be implemented to overcome the problems and challenges associated with digital technologies.” Digital learning is any type of learning that uses technology and it can happen across all curriculum learning areas including French language. In teaching and learning French language digital technologies can play a vital role. It has been observed that learning of any foreign language require the use of language laboratory well equipped with all the technology tools such as computers, radio, television, internet etc. This article aims to looking at the need for using digital technology in teacher education with special reference to French language. Also this study provides a general understanding of both teachers and students involvement in digital technologies as well as the effectiveness of French language teaching and learning with technologies.

What is teacher education?

Teacher education is a designed programme with the view of improving the teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower him to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein. According to Good in Dictionary of Education (1945), teacher education means, all the formal and non-formal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to assume responsibilities of a member of the educational profession or to discharge his responsibilities more effectively.

Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. Although ideally it should be conceived of, and organised as, a seamless continuum, teacher education is often divided into these stages: initial teacher training/education; induction; teacher development or continuing professional development. There is a longstanding and ongoing debate about the most appropriate term to describe these activities. The term 'teacher training' seems to be losing ground, at least in the U.S., to 'teacher education' (*Definitions.net*, 2020).

According to UNESCO (2005), teacher education addresses environmental, social, and economic contexts to create locally relevant and culturally appropriate teacher education programmes for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Teacher education generally includes four elements: improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers; increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach; pedagogy and understanding of children and learning; and the development of practical skills and competences. The balance between these four elements varies widely (Perraton, 2010).

French language and its status

French (*le français* or *la langue française*) is a Romance language of the Indo-European family. It descended from the Vulgar Latin of the Roman Empire, as did all Romance languages. French has evolved from Gallo-Romance, the spoken Latin in Gaul, and more specifically in Northern Gaul. Its closest relatives are the other langues d'oïl languages historically spoken in northern France and in southern Belgium, which French (Francien) has largely supplanted. A French-speaking person or nation may be referred to as "Francophone" in both English and French.

Adebayo (2019), points out that the French language is evolving, re-inventing itself, changing and becoming a multifaceted language, changing and adapting to modernity and cultural realities in the 21st century. According to Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (2014) cited by Adebayo French language is said to be the 4th most used language on the internet, 3rd in business, 2nd in international information and the media, the 2nd working language of most international organisations and the 2nd most learned language in the world.

Suleiman (2017), affirms that the 21st century witnesses the ascendancy of French in academic writing and international research; hence, its importance for international researcher. French has become the language of not only science, computing, diplomacy, tourism, aviation but also research and academic writing.

Who is a French teacher?

A French teacher is someone who instructs students in French language skills and introduces them to French culture. Language teachers offer instruction to children in a variety of settings, but are most commonly found in middle school and high school settings. These teachers plan and deliver lessons, assign and assess practice work and evaluate student progress throughout the school year in French. Working with young learners who may be unmotivated or unruly can be demanding and tiring, but many find great rewards when they are able to observe the many milestones reached by their students.

French teacher has some roles or responsibilities that can assist him to achieve his goals. The primary role of the French teacher in a multidimensional language world is to put in place conditions and activities so that French students are able to practice French language in a meaningful way or context. It is one of the French teacher's important responsibilities to build in students a positive attitude to learning French language either as a second language or foreign language. French teacher is also instrumental in creating a good and accommodative learning space within the classroom. With that students, who feel safe and confident are ready to learn the language. It is the French teacher who acts as facilitator, resource person and language model in the French classroom.

What are digital technologies?

Digital technologies are electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate store or process data. Examples of digital technologies include the following: social media, online games, multimedia and mobile phones. According to Darren (2009), the word digital comes from Latin digitus, finger and refers to one of the oldest tools for counting. When information is stored, transmitted or forwarded in digital format, it is converted into numbers at the most basic machine-level as zeroes and ones. In the context of this chapter, the term

represents technology that relies on the use of microprocessors; hence, computers and applications that are dependent on computers such as the Internet, as well as other devices such as video cameras, and mobile devices such as phones and personal-digital assistants (PDAs).

Digital technology includes all types of electronic equipment and applications that use information in the form of numeric code. This information is usually in binary code- that is, code that can be represented by strings of only two numeric characters. These characters are usually 0 and 1. Devices that process and use digital information include personal computers, calculators, automobiles, traffic light controllers, compact disc players, cellular telephones, communication satellites, and high-definition television sets (Invincible Web Solutions, 2019).

According to Kitchin and Dodge, (2011), so ubiquitously and insidiously are digital technologies permeating all aspects of life that some claim we now live and work in code/space. With this point of view we can now see that our life and work have been digitalised. For Fenwick and Edwards (2015), digital technologies and people are becoming interdependent, constituting one another, with emergent effects; they do not just mediate existing social forms, but are integral to practice.

Some Digital Technology Learning Tools for Classroom

Digital Technologies learning tools have become essential in carrying out daily learning activities. Research has made it possible for technology to be incorporated into classroom activities, in supporting group or individual learning. Digital technology can ameliorate the way students learn and as well as assist the teachers. According to Fenwick and Edwards (2015) where digital technologies are part of professional education, they tend to be treated as tools: useful to master, but clearly subordinate to the knowledgeable professional. Here are some major tools that can help teachers in enhancing learning in the classroom according to Modern Consumers (2017).

Electronic Whiteboards

Electronic whiteboards are very effective for group instructions. They are used for group presentations which enhance learning, and also students find it more compelling. Educators can use whiteboards to teach Languages, Social Studies, Sciences, and Mathematics. Electronic whiteboards are interactive such that, the teacher can project a diagram from a laptop onto the board and draw on it to help students understand quickly.

Desktops and Laptops

More teaching applications and classroom software are being introduced into the technology market. This drives the need for schools to get sophisticated computers with powerful processors to run the said applications. Classroom software helps in managing and storing of student records. Computers contribute to abolishing the need for bulky encyclopaedias and dictionaries as students can quickly look up information on the internet. Monitoring software can assist in gauging the level of understanding of students by; checking for their recall of Mathematics facts, quizzing their comprehension of a book, or by providing an interactive lab complete with a virtual dissection.

Projectors

In a large classroom, all students may not be able to view what the teaching is showing on the laptop screen, that's where projectors come in. A projector hooks up to a laptop and projects the screen to a larger whiteboard in front of the classroom. It allows students, even those at the back, to see a larger version of the laptop screen.

Videoconferencing Classroom Technologies

Through video conferencing, students in different geographical locations can attend to a lecture through online streaming. Video conferences can be set up on Skype or Google Hangouts, and Guest Speakers can easily address the students. Video conferencing can help reduce travel costs and time required to give speeches at different places.

Mobile Learning

Mobile devices enable learners to take their classrooms anywhere. There are more education apps available already that students, as well as teachers, can use. By using mobile devices, iPads, tablets, or other devices, educators and learners can maintain a connected classroom experience.

Television

Televisions can show current events in a country like business news, presidential elections, etc. They can also be used to play educational and instructional DVDs or videos on the history of a certain community.

Computer Networking

Networking of classroom computers is an effective way of using technology. The teacher can monitor what students are doing on their personal computer from a central point. Computer networking ensures that students do not deviate from what they are instructed to do. An alarm is raised on the central monitoring computer immediately a student deviates from the set instructions. Networking simply interconnects different classroom technologies to allow sharing of resources.

Distance Learning

Schools and training institutions have developed portals to facilitate distance learning. Students who find it hard to attend a class, or who cannot travel because of geographical locations can become part of the classroom using video technology and shared computing resources.

Virtual Field Trips

Computer systems and the Internet allow students to virtually travel anywhere the web can take them. Google classroom is a technology that can facilitate field trips to locations around the world or even outer space. New augmented reality and virtual reality technology can also provide students with the opportunity to see places or events they normally won't get to experience.

Word processing applications

Most computers come with word processing applications installed. For instance, Microsoft Office includes all necessary applications required to compose and organize data. Students can use these applications to write notes, check the spelling of words as they write with auto spell-check feature, and save notes for quick retrieval at a later date. Word processing applications help students discover new words. Teachers can teach students to use these classroom technologies during the learning sessions.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Digital Technology in Education

Digital technological achievements have turned the world to a big and comfortable place for people to live in. There are no doubt about how they have made people lives better and easier, especially in the fields of science, medicine and education. It can be used at all levels of education starting from nursery to University. However, like many other good things that have advantages, technology also has its disadvantages. Tools, such as computers, mobile devices and the internet, are now integrated into the educational system. The usage of digital technology in education has both advantages and disadvantages. Pano Savvidis, (2016), has highlighted six advantages of using digital technology in the classroom.

Digital technology improves engagement

When technology is integrated into lessons, students are expected to be more interested in the subjects they are studying. Technology provides different opportunities to make learning more fun and enjoyable in terms of teaching same things in new ways. For instance, delivering teaching through gamification, taking students on virtual field trips and using other online learning resources. What is more, technology can encourage a more active participation in the learning process which can be hard to achieve through a traditional lecture environment (Pano, 2016).

Digital technology improves knowledge retention

Students who are engaged and interested in things they are studying, are expected to have better knowledge retention. As mentioned before, technology can help to encourage active participation in the classroom which also is a very important factor for increased knowledge retention. Different forms of technology can be used to experiment with and decide what works best for students in terms of retaining their knowledge (Pano, 2016).

Encourages individual learning

No one learns in the same way because of different learning styles and different abilities. Technology provides great opportunities for making learning more effective for everyone with different needs. For example, students can learn at their own speed, review difficult concepts or skip ahead if they need to. What is more, technology can provide more opportunities for struggling or disabled students. Access to the Internet gives students access to a broad range of resources to conduct research in different ways, which in turn can increase the engagement (Pano, 2016).

Digital technology encourages collaboration

Students can practice collaboration skills by getting involved in different online activities. For instance, working on different projects by collaborating with others on forums or by sharing documents on their virtual learning environments. Technology can encourage collaboration with students in the same classroom; same school and even with other classrooms around the world (Pano, 2016).

Digital technology helps students to learn useful life skills

By using technology in the classroom, both teachers and students can develop skills essential for the 21st century. Students can gain the skills they will need to be successful in the future. Modern learning is about collaborating with others, solving complex problems, critical thinking, developing different forms of communication and leadership skills, and improving motivation and productivity. What is more, technology can help develop many practical skills, including creating presentations, learning to differentiate reliable from unreliable sources on the Internet, maintaining proper online etiquette, and writing emails. These are very important skills that can be developed in the classroom (Pano, 2016).

Digital technology benefits for teachers

With countless online resources, technology can help improve teaching. Teachers can use different apps or trusted online resources to enhance the traditional ways of teaching and to keep students more engaged. Virtual lesson plans, grading software and online assessments can help teachers save a lot of time. This valuable time can be used for working with students who are struggling. What is more, having virtual learning environments in schools enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing between teachers (Pano, 2016).

Disadvantages of digital technology

Everything is good in moderation, and technology is no exception. Here are some disadvantages of using digital technology in the classroom as highlighted by Brown Cassey.

Excessive screen time

It can often seem that students are constantly in front of a device: cell phones, tablets, computers, and gaming devices are prevalent in their lives. Adding technology to the classroom increases the overall amount of exposure to electronic devices. There are concerns that too much screen time can damage eyesight and, while disproved by science, a common misconception persists that it is associated with depression. This impact can be minimized if parents and teachers limit the number of hours students spend in front of screens (Brown, 2019).

Distractions

Technology can be a minefield of distractions. Ads, pop-ups, games, news, fun websites, social media, text messages, and more are constantly competing for our attention. This means teachers face the challenge of keeping students on task. How can we ensure students are doing what they've been assigned? By setting clear expectations and consequences, teachers can help encourage students to focus on their work. Parents and districts can also set up

internet blocks to help keep students from visiting other sites when they are supposed to be working (Brown, 2019).

Cheating

Cheating has always existed, yet technology has made it even easier in some ways. Students can copy and paste each other's work into their own assignments. They can even search the Internet for other people's works and submit them as their own. However, tools like Turnitin can help combat plagiarism. Teachers can require students to submit their papers and Turnitin will determine how much of the paper is similar to current or past submissions. It will also mark any anomalies it discovers for the instructor's review (Brown, 2019).

Less human interaction

When students use technology devices, they have less human interaction. Teachers and parents worry that lack of face-to-face socializing will leave students unable to communicate effectively when they need to have a real-life conversation. In reality, tech is just a tool designed to make our lives easier. Tech devices are the most advanced educational tools we have today following in the steps of other transforming classroom technology like chalkboards and pencils. As with any tool, how you use it matters. Technology devices support complex communication. They give students a way to work together on projects, access to a vast library of information and knowledge, and connect them to the wider world, which expands their horizons. If teachers and parents are still concerned about the time spent on a device, they can moderate screen time and provide activities that encourage more traditional interactions (Brown, 2019).

Unequal access to technology

Not all students have access to technology. Depending on their socioeconomic status and living environment, some students may not have access to reliable Wi-Fi or be able to afford dependable devices. These disparities can affect online learning activities, online assignments, and access to online help. There are some schools that provide technology for students, which is certainly helpful. Some educational grants can also help offset the costs of technology (Brown, 2019).

How can a French teacher use digital technology to teach?

Today digital technology offers an infinite number of possibilities that a French teacher can use to teach French differently to his/her students. Moreover, the use of digital technology in teaching French is an asset that will allow the teacher to vary the supports and have a better communication. In addition, the use of these technologies allows direct access to the language through textbooks, articles, songs, videos and audios, which will always emerge more and more from their students. By using these new tools in French class, the teacher will enable his/her students to be more autonomous and establish a new relationship with the French language by becoming more active. It then becomes more interesting to approach the language in its different forms.

The internet gives the French teacher instant access to French textbooks online, journals written by scholars on French language, and other information as regards the language. Let's start with the most complete and practical environment, because it is entirely online, that is

Google: messaging (Gmail), word processing (Docs), presentation (Slides), spreadsheet (Sheets), planning (Calendar), blog creation (Blogger), file hosting (Drive), questionnaires (Forms), etc. This online suite is ideal for collaborative work and requires only a simple Internet connection. There is even Google Classroom, a web app for teaching.

According to Elona (2015), “internet is perhaps the most effective in language teaching for the many advantages it presents. The Internet also serves as a medium for experiencing and presenting creative works. It promotes higher order thinking skills. Students develop communication skills by negotiating, persuading, clarifying meaning, requesting information, and engaging in true-life, authentic discussion. They develop social skills and their computer skills are promoted as they become able to use the computer (Elona, 2015). The Internet provides supplemental language activities which help students to develop their language skills (Singhal, 1997).

PowerPoint presentation is one type of digital technology tools by which the teacher can present images and texts with sound and simple animation. According to Gordon (2007), PowerPoint presentation is a presentation software (PS) by which combination of images, texts, sounds and graphs is possible in order to make developed multimedia presentations.” PowerPoint can provide assistance for language teachers with audio, visual and audio-visual effects during teaching in language classrooms. Therefore, the French teacher can use PowerPoint to present and organize classes. He can make a slide show of his/her lessons to the students. According to Jones (2002), using presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint generally needs little training in its use. Templates make it very easy to develop a good looking slide show. Media incorporation is straight forward as well as graphics, audio, and video can be added from pull-down menus. In addition, the French teacher can use PowerPoint, by adding a voiceover to his/her slides and save the presentation as a movie for the students to access. Carlos (2008) cited by Alshahrani (2017), illustrates in his study that the administrators and teachers describe PowerPoint as a very useful teaching aid and a valuable technology.

The Hot Potatoes software allows the teachers to make interactive assessments for students. The program offers some distinct modules for designing multiple choice quizzes, free questionnaires, crossword puzzles, tests and gap-filling texts. These modules are the computer and then can be shared on websites. So the French teacher can make use of that software during his/her teaching.

Blogs are a great way to get your students to collaborate and create something connected to the topic you are teaching. The French teacher can instruct his/her students to consult some of the blogs that teach French. After that he can ask them to create their own version of a teaching blog on Blogger. In that way they will grip with the subject matter whether it's grammar, literature or culture in order to teach others.

The French teacher can make use of audiovisual equipments during his/her teaching. The classrooms can be equipped with an audiovisual component system which can be linked to a laptop/ USB device. French teacher should aim to master the basic operational systems. This component system requires high technical skills to alter or restore settings or regain connection after power supply cut out. Waiting for staff to come and waiting for the system to be reset can considerably disrupt the pace of the lessons.

The French teacher can record his/her own grammar or culture lessons, and then post them on YouTube for his/her students to access it that will help students a lot in learning French. The French teacher can also encourage his/her students to watch instructional videos made by others users. For instance, the students can log in to *Learn French with Alexa* which teaches grammar, culture and pronunciation.

Podcasts are easily available and offer a variety of topics. They are useful for pronunciation and vocabulary purposes, as well as being a comprehension exercise. French teacher can use Learning with French-Podcasts.com, which has various categories. The French teacher can listen to the podcast sometimes with simultaneous English translation and then download the PDF transcript and he can also encourage his/her students to use Podcasts. This will help the students improve their listening comprehension, pronunciation and vocabulary.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that digital technology has been noticeable and touched the life of everyone all over the globe. The purpose of using digital technology in teacher education cannot be overemphasised. Because it allows teachers to communicate with their students, share vital information with them, upgrade teachers' skills and knowledge as well as that of their students. To be able to achieve such a great achievement there is a need for teachers and students to acquire efficient knowledge and skills on how to make use of the digital technological tools for teaching and learning. It is also important that teachers and students are provided with the necessary tools and equipment required for the achievement of the goals.

In addition, the use of digital technology allows students to be much better prepared for class, and provides teachers with attractive resources to make their classes much more human and sociable, where all students have the opportunity to participate regardless of their level. When used alongside traditional teaching, new technology can differentiate between educational centres, taking French teaching one step further in paying attention to diversity in the classroom and enriching the language learning process.

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Contact email: ganiyatomotola@gmail.com