

*Using ICT for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in  
Nigeria: Issues and Challenges*

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**Abstract**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become indispensable tool for both teachers and learners in various fields and discipline. The aspiration of many in this age is therefore aided by Internet facilities to the extent that ICT is gradually pushing aside the traditional library from educational scene. This paper is therefore an attempt to examine the effects of Computer and E-learning on the teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigeria, in order to keep up with the modernized communities in the current digital world. The paper gives an insight into the necessity of ICT in the teaching of Arabic and highlights its challenges and positive effects. This paper employs the use of questionnaire to elicit information from teachers and learners of Arabic in tertiary Institutions on the effectiveness of ICT in teaching Arabic. The paper is concluded by stressing the fact that the use of ICT will make Arabic teaching easier for teachers, more interesting to the learners and both the teachers and learners will be able to communicate and have an insight into the culture of the native speakers.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Arabic, Library, Teaching, Nigeria

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## **Introduction**

There has been much debate over the use of Computer and E-learning in the teaching of language especially foreign language like Arabic over the past few years. To this end, and since the development of a policy on Information and Communication Technology in Nigeria in the year 2000, ICT has continued to be the focus of all academics in the teaching and learning of language. This is due to the role it could play in the form of e-mails, SMS, LMS, e-encyclopedia etc which can make learners to be more comfortable during the learning process.

The introduction of this new process has always been a welcome phenomenon but not without some implications and challenges. Arabic language as one of the old Semitic languages which has survived the stormy of extinction up till date, has come to be accepted as one of the internationally recognized world languages of education, due to its viability as a language of education and the richness of its literature, which made Muslims and non-Muslims to get attracted to the study of severe aspects of the culture of the native speakers of the language.

The teaching and learning of Arabic in Nigeria has, thus, undergone many developments over the years, not minding the lukewarm attitude of government and religious undercurrent associated with the language. Many Scholars and experts in the field of Arabic have been coming up with the suggestions aimed at playing down the factors responsible for the poor state of Arabic in Nigeria, with a view to improving the teaching and learning of this language. Olaniyan (2002:59) once described the method employed in teaching Arabic in most Nigeria Institutions of higher learning as grammar translation method where the teacher lays emphasis on teaching the grammar of the language instead of communication skill and competence.

However, with the introduction of E-learning, the process of learning could be structured in different ways, either in the classroom, home, with or without a teacher, thereby gradually exposing the students to native speakers. Through this means, the students will have the opportunity of interacting with a broader and international audience, and this will enable them to be more cautious, pay more attention to polishing their work and think more deeply.

## **Information and Communication Technology in Perspective**

Information and Communication Technology has been defined severally by many scholars. The Wikipedia defines the term Information and Communication Technology as a term which covers all advanced technologies in manipulating and communicating information. Olagunju (2003) opines that these electronic systems can be used for broadcasting telecommunication and all forms of computer based communication. Information and Communication Technology centered education, therefore, covers the use of computers, online self-learning packages, Satellites, Radio, Optical fibre technology i.e Tele presence system and all types of information technology, hardware and software (Lillian, Rita, Akindolu 2002, Adebayo 2002, Olagunju 2003).

The concept of information and communication technology also covers the application of modern technologies which allow various forms of information to be

processed, transmitted, manipulated and retrieved with speed and accuracy. These include Data Communication on Digital, Telecommunication by using wired or wireless telephone, Computer hardware and Software which allow computer to function according to predetermined instructions. Tinio (2002) maintains that ICT includes communication devices or applications encompassing internet access, electronic mail, CD ROMs, telephone, online database, fax machines, scanners, projectors, radio, television, cellular phones networks, software, satellites system as well as the various services and applications associated with video conferencing and distance learning.

Due to the position occupied by ICT in the World today, it is expedient to apply these technological systems in our classroom activities especially in our tertiary institution in Nigeria. Bidmos (2009:9) view is apposite here, when he states that

Information and Communication Technology ICT which is now a must for effective Teaching/Learning of any subject should be acquired by the teacher of Religious Studies....The traditional absolute reliance on textbook for gathering information has become old fashioned. Through internet a teacher now enriches his knowledge with current information uploaded by some researchers for the benefit of others in the same field.

### **ICT and the Learning Process in Nigeria**

Teaching is a process of human development through activities designed to produce educated person. Teaching therefore involves activities that include learning carried out between the learners and the teaching material. Classroom teaching can therefore be likened to communication process where someone gives and the other receives. Teaching in its generic sense is thus a system of action intended to induce learning or what occurs when teachers by virtue of their institutional activities succeed wholly or in part in enabling pupils to learn (Ayo Dada 1999). Teaching is therefore aimed at providing suitable learning experiences that will help the learner to interact appropriately with the subject matter in order to bring about desired effective learning. The actualization of this goal depends on some factors which include the quality of teachers, availability of instructional materials and books, students' attitudes and other environmental influences which include government disposition to Education.

In 2000, Nigeria adopted a policy on information Technology with the aim of making Nigeria an IT adapted country and a leading player in the use of ICT. Since then, Information and Communication Technology has been on the lips of every academic and has become a good teacher which has provided opportunity of self-dependent for researchers and learners. It also offers various technologies that can be annexed to facilitate daily interaction across the globe.\

ICT has different roles to perform on teaching and learning. It is a device to capture, store, process and produce knowledge at a speed never imagined. It also plays instructional roles by making learners feel more relaxed to learn, apart from its ability

to reduce time and distance barriers, thereby making exchange of ideas from distant and remote areas more economical.

With the Federal Executive Council approval of a national ICT policy in March 2001, and establishment of a National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to oversee its implementation, the national ICT policy has a vision of making Nigeria an ICT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2007 using ICT as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The goal is to use ICT for education, creation of wealth, poverty eradication and job creation. The ICT policy gave 22 general objectives. Some of the objectives include

- i. To empower the youth with ICT skills and prepare them for global competition
- ii. To integrate ICT into the mainstream of education and training

### **The Application of ICT in the Teaching and Learning of Arabic Language**

Unlike the teaching of other Subjects, Language learning and teaching are dynamic with the introduction of new approaches and methodologies which in many cases are improvement on old methods or rediscoveries of other methods. Educational technology especially computers and e-learning have permeated virtually all areas of our lives and it will look vogue for anyone to lag behind in this new scheme of things. Teaching especially language teaching is therefore becoming a more difficult job, because teachers are expected to meet the challenges and the needs of students in order to move them towards the fulfilment of their individual potentials.

As stated earlier, the case of Arabic teaching especially in Nigeria and before the introduction of modern method of teaching started in form of rote learning whereby the teacher will repeat a portion for the students until the student learns it by heart and in most cases in group. The teaching and learning of Arabic however took a new turn in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the introduction of ICT. According to Oloyede (2009) Internet then becomes a good teacher which provides opportunities for Arabic Teachers and Learners than we had before and serves as a good companion for modern users of Arabic. Some years back, researchers and scholars who want to break the frontier of knowledge used to resort to the use of a library as a reliable and convenient source of obtaining data, due to its roles as the repository of all published documents, such as books, newspapers, journals and magazines. The Introduction of E-library has made the management of library service more easier and made reliance on printed books obsolete to the extent that ICT is gradually pushing aside traditional library from educational scene. Although, the situation in Nigeria libraries as far as E-library is concerned is progressing, there is need for training and retraining of technical expertise to oversee this new technology.

With the above new trend, teachers and learners do not need to rely on printed books and other physical materials for their educational needs, because many of the teachers of Arabic in Nigeria in this this 21<sup>st</sup> century are now ICT compliant and the use of ICT has made language teaching and learning more effective, due to access to a variety of sources, professional publications, and associations. Some of the most important reasons for using ICT in teaching include the following;

- It affords students to work at different rates and levels without affecting other students
- It improves the quality of education by increasing the learners' motivation and engagement by facilitating the acquisition of basic skills.
- It enhances teacher's training because it provides feedback to teachers and students through error correction and at times gives appropriate answer.
- The internet facilities afford both learners and teachers the opportunity to have access to different works of International standard.
- The teacher can adapt the computer to any standard to suite the learner
- High quality audio visual may provide sufficient backup for students
- The application of ICT also gives opportunities for communication between peer learners by participating in blog discussions, exchange mails, and search for information.

### Research Questions

The following research questions are put forward to really ascertain the impact of ICT on the teachers and learners of Arabic

- Is the Library still relevant as a dependable source of information?
- Is the internet a better source of information?
- Are there difficulties endangering the use of ICT by Arabic teachers?
- Has Nigeria government done enough in the provision of ICT facilities for effective teaching in our schools?
- Are there enough encouragement for students of Arabic to use ICT in the classroom?
- Do you exploit the opportunity given by ICT to improve your students' linguistic prowess?
- Can learning of Arabic with the aid of ICT make the students less dependent?
- Can ICT aid better understanding of Arabic?
- Does the provision of ICT boost learners' engagement?
- Does ICT as a teaching aid require specific skill?

### Data Analysis

ITEMS	YES	PERCENTAGE %	NO	PERCENTAGE %
Question One	20	50	20	50
Question Two	36	90	4	10
Question Three	40	100	NIL	0
Question Four	20	50	20	50
Question Five	30	75	10	25
Question Six	32	80	08	20
Question Seven	38	95	02	5
Question Eight	36	90	04	10
Question Nine	38	95	02	5
Question Ten	40	100	NIL	0

From the responses to the questions above, 50% of the respondents agreed that traditional library is still relevant as a source of information while 50% disagreed.

On the use of ICT as a better source of information 90% of the respondents answered “Yes” while 10% answered “No”

As to whether there are difficulties which can prevent Arabic teachers from making effective use of ICT, all the respondents answered “Yes”

50% of the respondents believed the government has done enough in the provision of ICT facilities in our higher Institutions while 50% answered “No”

Whether students are encouraged to use ICT facilities 75% answered “Yes” while 25% answered “No”

On the teachers’ ability to exploit the opportunity given to raise students’ awareness, 80% answered “Yes” while 20% answered “No”

Also 95% of the respondents believed the assistance given by ICT can make students to be less dependent while 5% answered “No”

On whether ICT can speed up the understanding of Arabic, 90% of the respondents agreed while 10% disagreed.

On whether ICT can boost learners’ engagement, 95% of the respondents agreed that ICT can boost learners’ engagement while 5% disagreed.

All the respondents however agreed on the need for a special skill in using ICT for teaching and learning.

From the above analysis, it was discovered that, the use of ICT in contemporary society has impacted upon almost all human interactions and its presence is felt in all human endeavour especially in the area of teaching and learning. This new technology is breaking all barriers at a faster rate with new choices and opportunities which are made available to teachers and learners.

### **Challenges of ICT**

In spite of the numerous benefits of ICT based-learning, some problems have been identified during the course of this research which could hinder the effective use of ICT in teaching and learning, especially in Nigeria. These include the following;

- a. Lack of efficient Infrastructure and trained manpower to use ICT facilities. It was discovered during the course of this research that most of the lecturers and students who are to use these ICT facilities are ignorant of how to put these facilities into effective use. In most cases, language laboratory technologists who are to assist course lecturers are not on ground, and where available, they often find it difficult to operate systems that are Arabic enabled.
- b. Nigeria educational policy especially the language content does not suit the incorporation of ICT or E-learning at early stage. However, one needs to

commend some state governments in Nigeria, such as State of Osun in South Western Nigeria for the introduction of “Tablet of knowledge” produced for students at Senior Secondary School level which is a way of preparing them to be ICT compliant in future. Also TetFund which is an agency of the federal government of Nigeria has been of enormous help in the provision of infrastructure and ICT facilities in Nigeria tertiary institutions, with the aim of making students of Higher Learning ICT compliant

- c. Erratic power supply is another identified problem endangering the use of ICT. It was discovered that most of the tertiary institutions with language laboratory and E-library, find it difficult to put them into effective use due to unstable power supply and paucity of fund to buy fuel to power the generating plant.
- d. Another hurdle still at large, is about those living in remote areas where access to ICT remains largely out of reach, with many of them dearth of any type of Internet, including the availability of Telephone lines, Cellular coverage, and any form of electronic transmission data.

Above all, students disposition to the use of computer and internet facilities are not encouraging. Many of the students who are ICT compliant in most cases fail to use the knowledge in developing their academic performance and learning skill.

### **Recommendation**

In the last section of this paper, the challenges facing ICT in the teaching and learning of Arabic were examined. In this sub section, however, attempt shall be made to offer some suggestions which could serve as remedy to the identified obstacles and challenges.

The Nigerian educational policy should be reviewed and restructured with the aim of developing ICT curricula for primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, with a view to responding effectively to the emerging challenges in teaching and learning via the use of ICT.

There is need for collaborative efforts between the government at the Centre and State in making basic infrastructural facilities available. Teaching equipment such as Computer (Laptop and desktop), power point equipment and Internet facilities should be made available and be properly monitored.

Because of the role of the ICT in tertiary education especially in the area of online conference, virtual discussion with teachers online and the opportunities which are opened to learners and teachers to learn at their own pace. The government and private organizations should contribute to the training and retraining of teachers and other personnel by conducting intensive computer training for teachers who are not competent enough to handle computerized teaching.

The ICT policy should be properly and thoroughly implemented since the government is aware of its importance. If this is done, it can be harnessed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of language learning.

Teachers and students of Arabic should explore the World of ICT in order to widen their academic horizon and be exposed to the modern day technological challenges especially on technical aspects of ICT and the development of content.

The government should encourage further deregulation of telecom industry, in order to make it more affordable and available especially for those in the remote areas of the country.

### **Conclusion**

An attempt has been made albeit briefly in this paper to set a new agenda for teachers of Arabic, in order to be aware of the new trend and recognize the enviable position occupied by ICT as a vital tool in Information and in the classroom activities.

Based on the findings from the review of literature on ICT and language teaching, it was observed that language teaching is becoming a more interesting and difficult job everyday due to some factors and challenges which teachers are expected to meet in order to prepare the students for the task ahead of them.

It was also discovered through this research work that 90% among teachers and learners have interest and the ambition to be ICT compliant due to enormous benefit that could be gained from it. It is therefore important that teachers should be made aware of the challenges in the utilization of ICT in teaching Foreign Languages. This awareness will enable such teachers to design programs that will help students to have more understanding of the subjects, promote learners involvement and participation with sustained attention in learning Arabic language. Educators must therefore prepare themselves for a technology rich future and enjoy the improvement brought about by ICT in the teaching and learning, because extrapolating such current activities in teaching and the use of computerized teaching will surely have great impact on Language teaching and learning.



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