

Rewiring English Language Teaching: A Developmental Concept for the 21st Century

Richard Watuulo, PhD.
Department of Languages and Literature
Uganda Christian University
Mobile: +256772770840
Email: rwatuulo@ucu.ac.ug

Abstract

Success in English, right from school level is a key factor in national competitiveness and is of paramount importance to national economies in a globalized world. The main purpose of language is communication. Teachers of language are therefore expected to produce, out of the education system, learners who can functionally be able to communicate effectively. Technology being the art of making, usage and knowledge of tools, techniques, crafts, systems or methods of organization in order to solve problems or serve some purpose, is the key in the revolution of education for transformation of the society and realization of sustainable development. Emergence of new technologies in different fields such as; law, medicine and construction among others is the test time for globalization and timely development in socio-economic, political, psychological, physical and physiological aspects. This paper addresses how teachers of English language can use this new media for knowledge creation and dissemination in order to revolutionize the way of thinking and doing things. This includes aspects such as using free phone applications for translation; twinning ordinary phone to ebook reader; manipulating digital technology for purposes of interaction through You Tube, Twitter, Flicker, blogs and Face book and using Skype for interviews.

Key words: Language teaching, technology, societal development

Background and Context of the study

Language performance is increasingly being discussed as a competence issue, a fundamental concept that many teachers need to engage with and reflect in their classroom practice if the learners they teach are going to meet the requirements of the technology evolution of the world today. A well-known way to create meaningful context for teaching English is through using media, which can be delivered through a wide variety of print, audio, and visual formats.

In recent years there has been a groundswell of interest in how computers and the internet can best be harnessed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education at all levels and in both formal and non-formal settings. Over the past few years, educationists have begun to see the need for planned innovation, to recognize that if educational change is to keep pace with and match changes in society, if it is at the same time to maintain standards and values which may be seen as transcending particular times and particular societies, and if it is to respond to that increased understanding of education and curriculum which has come from recent work in the field of curriculum studies, it must be deliberately managed rather than merely left to happen.

The starting point of this paper is an interrogation of what it means to teach traditional language courses and what education policy-makers and planners must be clear about in terms of what educational outcomes are being targeted. The paper identifies key strategies to address the problem. It also underscores the need to teach interdisciplinary courses across the university curriculum that embrace elements of ICT in order to ensure relevance and marketability of the graduates.

The current information age requires teachers to be familiar with media and media literacy. Thoman (2003) argues that media literacy has the influential role in educational programmes, including second language learning. Media can be integrated into language lessons in a variety of ways by developing activities based on radio programmes, television shows, newspapers, and videos.

This paper uses the analogy of a production line to argue that teaching, comparable to the feeding of inputs into line processes, should not happen in isolation of technology, comparable to the quality assurance role in production. The latter is a critical deliberate management function whose goal is high standard outputs (*in this case the students who can effectively compete in the global market*).

Shortage of skilled workers, high turnover, rapid business growth have placed recruiting, selecting, and placing employees among the top three priorities of human resources professionals. These factors have led firms to search for the candidates from outside their local area on a national and international level. At the same time, numerous companies have cut back on travel due to rising costs (McDowell, 1999). Consequently, many organizations have turned to interviewing job applicants at a distance. The popular press is replete with stories of firms that are conducting interviews by videoconference (e.g., Hanover, 2000; Lublin, 1999; Ross, 1998).

Like a variety of other technological implementations, there is a wide gap between the use of alternative technologies for conducting job interviews and research on the effects of these media. Is this reliance on alternative media well-founded/ what might be lost in the quest for efficiency? Do these media offer

benefits beyond efficiency gains? In this paper, I begin to narrow the gap between practice and research by addressing these questions. The paper explains the need for a paradigm shift from the traditional approach to teaching English language related courses at university level to that which embraces the use of technology and empowers learners with the competencies to use in real life situations.

It should be noted as Schweisfurth, (2011) correctly points out, that education policy makers and planners often seem to delude themselves that it is not necessary to think about how the people affected by the implementation will react to change, or about how the implementation process might be affected by the existing classroom conditions. It is against this background that this study is premised on the views of students and lecturers in the selected institution involved in the research.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to assist universities to come up with clear strategies and a roadmap of how to integrate the teaching of English language based courses with information communication technology in order to enable the graduates thereof to be able to compete effectively in the job market.

Objectives of the study

- To identify ways in which information communication technology can be integrated in teaching language based courses in the university curriculum
- To empower practitioners to engage with new trends in this approach to instruction at university level

Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the current approach being used in terms of pedagogy in the field of English language at university level?
- To what extent has the introduction of ICT contributed to the teaching of English language based courses?
- What are the challenges facing the integration of ICT and ELT instruction at universities?

Methodology

This study was a qualitative case study. This approach was used to enable the researcher obtain and interpret informants' meanings and experiences in their natural setting. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the qualitative approach enables the researcher to study a phenomenon in its natural setting and attempt to make sense of it. Neuman et al (2011: 240) further assert that when researchers sample, they select some cases to examine in detail, and then use what they learn from them to understand a much larger set of cases. It can thus be argued that qualitative sampling helps to deepen understanding about a larger process, and relationships in the social

world. These aspects accentuate, enhance, or enrich key features or situations.

This study employed purposive sampling techniques. Therefore, 10 ELT lecturers, 78 students, 15 ICT personnel and 6 department heads from Uganda Christian University formed part of the study. Wide arrays of data collecting techniques were used for the purpose of getting accurate information. The research instruments that were employed were; interviews, documentary analysis, questionnaires and observation check lists. Interviews were administered to lecturers and departmental heads. This was helpful in gathering data from this calibre of university staff that are rather busy and have very limited time on their hands. Questionnaires were used to collect data from students and ICT personnel. Considering that questionnaires are a reliable tool for data collection from a varied source of participants within a limited timeframe, it was only proper that this tool had to be used.

A documentary analysis was carried out for the purpose of gathering secondary data. This tool was used considering that many universities keep records in line with the curriculum and issues related to pedagogy. This gave a very useful insight as far as what was taking place in the institution under study as opposed to what was otherwise observed. This in particular related to classroom practice.

Triangulation of data strategy was used to collect the data. As Neuman et al (2011: 165) aptly put it, triangulation requires using multiple theoretical perspectives to plan a study or interpret the data. The data were then analyzed to reflect the categories that emerged from the study.

Results and Discussion

Overview of the use of media in the language classroom

According to Gina et al (2011: 10), the mid- to late 1990s was an exciting time for those concerned with incorporating new technology into their teaching of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). Commonly referred to as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), or sometimes with the broader term Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), they argue that the field took huge leaps forward during these years. One central way that the order was brought to the field of CALL in the 1990s was to push for technology to be introduced into the language classroom and evaluated according to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles that were known to create effective learning environments. These principles improved student language by providing opportunities for genuine social interaction, the performance of authentic tasks, and the creative use of language.

Smith (1999) authored a text that gave teachers concrete ideas how to apply SLA techniques in the classroom, such as using email pen-pals to encourage students to interact with others in the target language, and choosing software that allowed students to work

at their own individual pace and make choices about the tools that they may choose to use or ignore, thus boosting autonomy. It should however be noted that many pre-service and in-service teachers approach the use of technology with a variety of strong assumptions. Importantly, if these assumptions are not identified and addressed, they impact the way that teacher trainees interpret the importance of SLA principles when using language technologies. Therefore, there is a critical need to make sense of these initial assumptions when designing professional development courses for pre-service and in-service teachers.

One way to accomplish this is to adopt Warschauer's (1998) framework, which explains the vastly different perspectives with which researchers in language technology approach their work, and provides a needed bridge between varying assumptions. Although Warschauer (1998) was describing researchers' perspectives, the framework easily lends itself to helping novice teachers identify their own approaches to instructional technology and to thoughtfully explore and consider other approaches, hopefully leading to a well informed and productive use of technology in the classroom.

Warschauer's Model

Warschauer (1998) suggests that researchers working in the field of language technology approach their work from very different positions. These differences have a profound influence on the assumptions that they make and the conclusions that they draw. These positions are as follows: (1) determinist, (2) instrumental, and (3) critical. I offer a brief summary of these assumptions here below:

Determinist position

According to Warschauer (1998), a determinist position associates the mere presence of computers with successful language learning. In other words, technology has a "magic" effect on learning, and simply including it will determine a more positive outcome for any activity. Researchers who approach their work from this position are quick to draw positive conclusions about technology's impact and are likely to ignore the many complex and intervening factors surrounding technology use. I hasten to add that even as teachers embrace technology use, they should not lose sight of this fact.

Instrumental position

Those who hold the instrumental perspective believe that technology is just a tool that is not capable of bringing about positive learning results in and of itself. Rather, the result depends on how well the technology is incorporated into the lesson, how well it supports the objectives, and how well the computer-based activities are managed. Thus, although technology can be instrumental in bringing about effective language learning, it all depends on the abilities of the teacher to implement CALL in the classroom.

Critical position

It is imperative for teachers of language to note that the critical position regarding technology learning indicates that a learning environment has its own ecosystem and that any addition to the ecosystem- such as instructional technology- brings about a slightly or radically different learning environment. These subtle or obvious changes are often sociocultural; there may be shifts in power, identity, or communication patterns, or changes in relationships between the individuals and groups. For example, a teacher may notice that when students hold a class meeting through an online discussion board (rather than face- to-face), there are changes in power, identity, and relationships. Quieter students may lead or even dominate the online discussion, and students with stronger reading-writing proficiency have the advantage in a text-based environment, in contrast to the advantage in face-to-face settings for those with stronger listening-speaking skills.

What can teachers of English Language borrow from Warschauer's model in terms of their professional development?

Language being the human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of communication is intertwined and interrelated with different modes of communication; computing being one such media. Technology is the human interface in development and there is no gainsaying the fact that the internet has revolutionized computer and communication tremendously over the last twenty years. The potential and possibilities offered by internet usage are obviously immense and practically inexhaustible and properly harnessed will play the key role in human development within whichever set goals of millennium development.

In light of the above observations, there is need to bring clarity to the many different perspectives that ESL/EFL teacher educators encounter in their practice. Teachers need to make informed decisions regarding appropriate activities for professional development. As Warschauer 1988:12 aptly puts it, ESL/EFL teachers may be predisposed to believe that the mere presence of technology will bring about not only positive results in their classrooms, but also negative results. Therefore, a teacher who takes up the determinist position may be (1) a technophile (a lover of technology, certain that it will fix any instructional problems), or (2) a technophobe (a hater of technology, certain that it will destroy instruction). In addition, the teacher may hold the (3) instrumental position, (viewing technology as a neutral tool, certain that its success or failure is entirely dependent on the instructional choices that are made), or a (4) critical position (viewing technology as capable of impacting classrooms in deep, subtle, and unpredictable ways, certain that sociocultural elements should be considered when using and evaluating technology use).

In a nut shell therefore, the following factors have to be taken on board when conducting professional development activities for ESL/EFL teachers in the area of CALL:

1. To present positive experiences with spotlighted technologies (both familiar and novel) to foster imagination and innovation in using them to teach language
2. To provide rich experiences and knowledge of SLA principle-driven uses of technologies to teach language
3. To foster critical consideration of both obvious and subtle sociocultural impacts of technology on learners, teachers and the community

Ultimately, the goals for all the teachers should be the same- to develop comfort with language learning technologies, to approach them with innovation, to design instruction according to sound SLA principles, and to critically consider the sociocultural impacts of technology integration.

Process Writing and the Internet: Blogs and Ning Networks in Classroom

New media impacts on knowledge creation and dissemination. In the 21st Century, there has emerged media technology that is revolutionizing the way of thinking and doing things by making the world a global village. Many employers and potential ones too, raise concerns about employees or otherwise, who cannot write effectively hence creating a communication gap in organizations. Teachers of English language can play an effective role in addressing this problem, by embracing the process writing model in their practice. Isabela, 2011: 26 argues that in contrast to the product approach to writing, which is based on studying and replicating textual models, the process approach involves multiple and repeated steps that compel the writer to closely consider topic, language, purpose for writing, and social reality of the audience. According to Ferris and Hedgcock (2005:8), "as a transactional activity, writing presents a process that must be undertaken with the reader's background knowledge, needs, interests and ideologies in mind."

The process approach reflects the fact that writing involves a relationship between the writer and his or her audience that produces an awareness of authentic social situations and an affinity to collaborate with others. Therefore, the process approach fits in with the socio-constructivist view of education that suggests successful learning is enhanced when it is based on the needs, worldview, and sociocultural background of the learner. In other words, student-centered teaching that makes learning relevant to students and their social realities results in greater interest, involvement, and confidence in language learning. For this reason Isabela, (2011: 26) citing Reid (2001), goes further and argues that it is important to structure a writing curriculum around the discourse genres that correspond to those situations where students will use English communicatively in their personal, academic, and professional endeavours.

Among the many strategies and tools to incorporate meaningful activities into the writing curriculum, the use of the internet stands out for its ability to create conditions for idea generation, research and collaboration, especially with teenage learners who are accustomed to interacting online with social media. Social networking that is targeted to ESL/EFL writing instruction also offers great potential to integrate the additional skills of reading, speaking, and listening. Some examples of software that allows people to connect, to communicate, and to collaborate on line are blogs, wikis, and podcasts (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007). These platforms are interactive and multimodal by nature and place texts, images, videos, and audio recording in one location visited by a community of language learners. Two specific examples here will exemplify how to supplement regular classroom activities with interactive and multimodal features of two online social media platforms- blog and a Ning network.

Blogs

A blog (a blend of the two words web and log) is a web page with a diary or journal entries that incorporates different postings by authors and responses to these posts by an audience. According to Bloch (2008), blogs are an ideal resource for the teaching of writing because they:

- Are easy to create and maintain;
- Encourage students to be more prolific writers (This is absolutely necessary in terms of writing CVs, reports, and resumes);
- Make writing easier to share;
- Support group work, feedback, and collaboration;
- Provide opportunities to write outside class;
- Can link to related texts and multimedia;
- Provide students with a sense of authorship; and
- Can be used in various ways by the instructor.

Two websites that support the free creation of blogs are www.blogger.com and <http://wordpress.com>.

Ning

An alternative to a blog is a group social networking site such as Ning (www.ning.com). Ning provides more tools than a blog; Teachers and students can receive professional advice and help on how to write a good personal statement; CVs and build a profile that can sell.

Using blogs and nings, teachers can give tasks such as Blogging an argument in an effort to enable them write logically and coherently. The following websites can also be helpful in terms of composing an introductory paragraph:

([http:// grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/intros.htm](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/intros.htm)) and

[http:// home.wortips.about.com/od/paperassignments/a/introsentence.htm](http://home.wortips.about.com/od/paperassignments/a/introsentence.htm) and

for the structure of an argumentative essay:

www.buowl.boun.edu.tr/students/types%20of%20essays/ARGUMENTATIVE%20ESSAY.htm.

The activities I have described above exemplify how web-based social networking tools offer excellent opportunities to conduct the pre-writing, drafting, and peer review, and revising steps of the writing process. In addition to developing important writing and other skills in English and learning to work collaboratively, on projects, using the internet for ESL/EFL instruction also advances students' digital literacy. When writing about topics that are relevant to their needs and interests, students are apt to respond to enthusiastically and work collaboratively to craft written work in types of genres that will benefit them in their academic pursuits and subsequent careers.

Video conferencing, telephone, and face-to-face media Vs Interviews

As the world goes digital, there is need for teachers of English to equip their students with the techniques necessary for this to happen. Increasingly, many companies are conducting interviews using the above media and therefore it is necessary to include a component of this aspect in the curriculum. Straus et al (2001) in their research conducted with fifty-nine MBA students using face-to-face meetings and either by videoconference or telephone, found out that interviewers evaluated applicants more favourably in telephone versus face-to-face interviews. This difference was stronger for less physically attractive applicants, which suggests that the telephone filtered negative, visual cues. Although interviewers reported more difficulty regulating and understanding discussions by video conference versus face-to-face, they did not evaluate applicants less favourably by videoconference. A principal goal of interviews is to evaluate applicant's job-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. These evaluations, in turn, affect selection decisions. I propose that characteristics of communication media be deliberately taught as part of the school curriculum.

Numerous studies show that nonverbal cues are powerful predictors of interpersonal evaluations. Cues communicate visually, such as eye contact, smiling, nodding, and body position, are used to express emotions and reactions such as attraction or dominance (Pruitt and Seilheimer, 1981). These expressions, in turn, influence the development of social relationships. Non verbal signals contribute to the formulation of initial evaluations, positive or negative, and cues such as eye contact intensify these impressions. In job interviews, studies of applicant non verbal behaviours generally show that "positive" behaviours, such as smiling and direct eye contact, are associated with higher evaluations of applicants by interviewers, and "negative" behaviours, such as frowning and avoidance gazes, are associated with lower evaluations (Howard and Ferris, 1996).

Other visual cues also affect how we evaluate others. For instance, there is substantial evidence showing that people are attracted to others who have similar demographic characteristics (McGrath, 1984), and some demographic traits are conveyed visually. In

the context of employee selection, numerous studies show that interviewers' judgments are influenced by physical and demographic characteristics, many of which are unrelated to job performance (Roehling, 1999). These biases are especially robust for perceptions of physical attractiveness. Physically attractive people are consistently perceived as more intelligent, socially skilled, dominant, and mentally healthy than are physically unattractive people (Feingold, 1992) and are generally preferred in personnel decisions (Siegfried and Pearce, 1981; Schneider and Nelson, 1996).

The factors discussed above are a critical indicator of the fact that care needs to be taken in terms of pedagogy to equip learners with the tools necessary to compete favourably in the job market. Retooling the language teacher would be the first step in the right direction.

WHAT ARE THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF ICT TO THE LANGUAGE TEACHER?

According to Reilly (2012:2), English teaching professionals working with children in primary school, adolescents in secondary school, or adults at university know that learners nowadays think and behave differently than those of previous generations. These students were born into a world of information technology; they prefer to multitask rather than focus on one thing at a time, and they can be more attracted to the ideas of peers or a web video than what their teachers have to offer. This generation has been given different names, including Net Gen, the Millennials, and Generation Y (McCrindle Research 2006). For purposes of this paper, I will use the term Generation Y.

Gen Y at school

Educators have also discussed the nature of Gen Y and the challenges that they bring to the classroom. Evidently, the "old way" of schooling, namely the teacher as "sage on the stage" is not effective with Gen Y (Skiba 2008). Experienced teachers who have been around a while know that the values today's students hold are not congruent with traditional course content and methods. Teachers who merely follow the textbook are likely to be perceived as "old hat." Therefore, teacher effectiveness depends on the ability to adapt instruction to the needs of today's learners.

Teaching strategies for tech-savvy students

ELT professionals have identified many useful ways to bring new technology into the classroom, including creating wikis; using Web Quests; implementing video-based activities through sites such as You Tube; incorporating video games and blogs; and making use of instant messages.

Gen Y individuals are kinaesthetic and visual learners

Human resource departments in today's firms have discovered the value of simulation software to recruit and train Gen Y (Skiba 2008). Simulations of the real world, or "virtual reality," engage and motivate Gen

Y because they are visual and involve learning by doing. According to Polimeni, Burke, and Benyaminy (2009: 66), employers realize that “if they want to appeal to this technologically savvy generation, they will need to dramatically change the way they market the accounting profession. It begs the question; Don’t teachers need to change as well?

Similarly, in the field of education, Faust et al. (2001) describe the mismatch between Gen Y’s learning styles and their instructors’ teaching styles. She modified the teaching methods and materials being used in a university computer course to make them more attractive for today’s students. Her research suggests that students prefer kinaesthetic and visual learning activities over traditional teacher-centered and text-based tasks.

CONCLUSION

If any realistic paradigm shift is to take place, there is need to shift focus from professional development of ICTs that are “heavy on teaching the tools and light on using the tools to teach.” Globally universities need to develop curricular that are cross-cutting over the faculty divide and take into account the integration of ICT in the teaching of language based courses. Additionally, drivers of ICT use need to be identified, including those that relate to curriculum and pedagogy, infrastructure, capacity-building, language and content, and financing. There is also need to streamline structures through identification of stakeholders and harmonize efforts across the different interest groups. This should be premised on a robust model of training, materials delivery and a clear set of relevant success indicators. There should also be a systematic and sustained monitoring and evaluation strategy to enable universities to successfully use this approach.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the management of Uganda Christian University should restructure its curriculum to take on board the integration of ICT with the teaching of English based courses at University in order to make it truly ‘joined-up’.
2. It is also recommended that UCU management should organize workshops at which this new approach to teaching is passed on to its stakeholders. This will help bridge the gap with lecturers to overcome culture change factors and any resistance that might result from those who feel that new pedagogical behaviour does not fit with locally accepted university norms.
3. There is also need for this innovation in English language education to be contextualized within the curricula of other universities within Uganda and the East African region. This can be done with the support of the Inter-University Council of East Africa as sufficient financial, material, and human resources must be available to implement the innovation.

References

- Dudeny, G., and N.Hockly. (2007). How to teach English with technology. Harlow, England; Pearson Education.
- Egbert, J. And E. Hanson-Smith, eds. (1999). CALL environments; Research, practice, and critical issues. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Faust J., E. Ginno, J. Laherty, and K. Manuel. (2001). Teaching information literacy to Generation Y: Tested Strategies for teaching the headphone wearing, itchy mouse-fingered, and frequently paged. Poster presented at the Association for College and Research Libraries 10th National Conference, Denver, C.O.
- Feingold, A. (1992). Good looking people are not what we think. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111,304-341.
- Ferris, D., and J.S. Hedgcock. (2005). Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process, and practice. 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gina, M., and Lisa. A. (2011). Identifying our Approaches to Language Learning Technologies; Improving Professional Development. *English Teaching Forum Journal* 49 (3): 10 -16.
- Hanover, D. (2000). Hiring gets cheaper and faster. *Sales and Marketing Management*, 152, 87-90.
- Howard, J.L, and Ferris, G.R. (1996). The employment interview context; Social and situational influences on interview decisions. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (75): 477-486.
- Lublin, J. (1999). Hunting CEOs on a 32-inch screen: a recruiter uses Video to search from afar. *Wall street journal*, p.1
- McCrindle Research. (2006). New generations at work: Attracting, recruiting and retraining Generation Y. Sydney, Australia: McCrindle Research. [www.ac.nz/pdf/New Generations At Work.pdf](http://www.ac.nz/pdf/New%20Generations%20At%20Work.pdf).
- McDowell, E. (1999). Travel costs likely to rise 5-7 percent in '99 after 8 percent jump in '98. *Star Tribune Newspaper of the twin Cities*, p.2.
- McGrath, J.E. (1984). *Groups: interaction and performance* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Neuman, W.L (2011) *Social Research Methods. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Pearson.
- Polimeni, R.S., J.A. Burke and D. Benyaminy. (2009). Using computer simulations to recruit and train Generation Y accountants. *The CPA journal* 79(5): 64-68.
- Reid, J. (2001). Writing. In *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*, ed. R. Carter and D. Nunan, 28-33. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.
- Roehling, M.(1999). Weight-based discrimination in employment; psychological and legal aspects. *Personal psychology* (52), 969-1016.
- Ross, S.(2010). Job Search by Video conference; face-to-face and cross country. *The Los Angeles Times*, p.5.
- Schweisfurth, M. (2011). Learner-Centred education in developing country contexts; from solution to problem/ *International Journal of Educational Development* 3; 419-26.
- Skiba, D.J. (2008). Nursing education 2.0; Games as pedagogical platforms. *Nursing Education Perspectives* 29 (3): 174-75.
- Thoman, E. (2003). Media literacy; A guided tour of the best resources for teaching; *The Clearing House* 76(6): 278-83. www.jstor.org/stable/301899851.
- Warschauer, M. (1998). Researching technology in TESOL; Determinist, instrumental, and critical approaches. *TESOL Quarterly* 32 94): 757-761.