

EXAMINING THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) SKILLS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHERS FOR FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The study aimed at examining the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills of French language teachers for functional education in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones of Enugu State, Nigeria. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The population of the study was all the 46 French language teachers in Nsukka Education Zone and all the 39 French language teachers in Obollo-Afor Education Zone in the public secondary schools in the areas. Out of these, the researcher could only reach 37 and 31 teachers in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Zones respectively. A 12-item questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two specialists in the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) and one specialist in Educational Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha method. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.76. The data for the research question were analysed with mean scores and standard deviations while those of the hypothesis were analysed with t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that most of the teachers lacked the basic ICT skills that are required for functional French language teaching and learning; and that the teachers in Nsukka Zone were more ICT compliant than their counterparts in Obollo-Afor Zone. It was recommended, among others, that ICTs should be fully integrated into the French language curricula to encourage technology mindset among the teachers.

Keywords: ICT, French language, teachers, functional education

Introduction

The Nigerian French language teachers are trained to equip the learners with the knowledge, values, skills, attitudes and competences that are envisaged in the basic and senior secondary school curricula of the subject. One of such competences, according to Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2012: 1) is for the learners

“..... to use French language as a tool for enhancing technological excellence in whatever discipline they may choose in future”. To achieve this objective, the French language teachers are supposed to make technologies an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is through this that they will be able to guide the learners on how to navigate the rapidly moving digital age. This, of course, requires the services of committed and devoted teachers who will be able to motivate the learners and stimulate their interest on the subject matter, thereby making it relatively easy for them to be happy and enjoy their lessons. One of the ways of achieving this, according to Khirwadka (2007), is for the teachers to integrate Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in their subject areas, in this context the French language.

ICTs refer to the handling and processing of information through electronic and communication devices like computers, televisions, radios, video cassette recorders, telephone, video compact discs, audio compacts and so on. They have to do with the receiving, recording, processing, transmitting and retrieving of information. Saidu and Sabina (2019: 136) defined the concept as “an umbrella term that includes communication devices or applications encompassing radio, television, cellular phone, computer and network hardware and software and satellite system as well as the various services and applications associated with them such as video conferencing and distance learning”. It is believed that, if properly used, they can serve as a powerful tool in the teaching-learning process as they have the potential to administer to the educational needs of individual learners. Hence, issues relating to ICTs are at the front burner of global educational thoughts and practices. Through them, the Nigerian learners of French can acquire the necessary knowledge, values and skills that will place the educational system at the global level of relevance and competitiveness. Such learners are equipped to adjust to the changing world of the information explosion and to make positive contributions to the society. That is functional education.

Functionality is at the core of every education process. It is the attribute of an education system that prepares its product for a future of work and service through improved relevance, quality and efficiency. An education system with this quality makes itself adaptable to better serve the world of work. Hence, Akpa (2019: 367) relates functional education to “the development and applicability of requisite knowledge, experience and skills for individual and societal well being, preservation and growth”. Such education prepares the learners for life both for the present and future. It has helped many nations in tackling major development problems such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. This is mainly because both the individual capabilities of the learners and the needs of the society are matched with the curriculum. As may be expected, it requires a rich learner-centred interactive knowledge environment that leads itself to the acquisition of the ability to solve societal problems. That is what leads to growth and development.

Without doubt, for the above quality of education to be attained and sustained, teachers need to be committed to their work and have confidence in their ability to teach. They should show love to their students by caring about both their present needs and the possible demands of their future work. As highly trusted agents of human capital development, it is imperative for them to regularly develop themselves professionally to improve their capacity of transmitting the necessary competences that could produce the right persons for the society. This is in line with the stipulation of NERDC (2013: 43)

that teacher education should “provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to changing situations”. In addition to the availability and commitment of such qualified and productive teachers, functional education requires the optimum deployment of technologies in the teaching-learning process.

However, available data on the availability of such technologies and the readiness of the teachers to use them in their instructional delivery seem not to be encouraging. For instance, a study by Adimora, Onah, Akaneme, Akubuilu, Eya and Umeano (2014) shows that teachers in Enugu State do not just lack access to ICT facilities, but are not ready to use them in their teaching. Similarly, Ezekoka, Isiozor and Anum (2017) report that most teachers do not possess the basic foundation of computer literacy. The reports reinforce the concerns raised by Ukpong (2014: 4) that “the alarming situation today is that while students and even pupils are very conversant with the use of ICT gadgets, many teachers are completely naïve”. This may still be the situation despite the fact that Nigeria started the implementation of ICT policy in 2001 (Osei, 2007). In consonance with this, Onuekwusi and Onyeka (2017) assert that Nigeria has not meaningfully adhered to UNESCO planning guide for ICT in teacher-education which stipulates that it should be infused into the entire teacher preparation programme instead of just being restricted to a single course. What all the above scholars seem to suggest is that teachers are poorly supported by ICT facilities to back up their teaching.

The above reports do not seem to show that Nigeria is at present well prepared for functionality in its educational system. It may not be surprising, therefore, that the country is really manifesting some signs of dysfunctionality in many ramifications. For instance, there are many cases of violence, dishonesty, mental illness, drug abuse, examination malpractice, armed robbery, kidnapping and so on in the country today. One of the major reasons for all these may be related to what Anikweze (2019: 379) has in mind when he asserts that “Indeed, the inevitable result of dysfunctional education is that schools turn out graduates without useful knowledge, skills, and so not only are they easily alienated from their own environment but they also constitute nuisance to the society”. This reinforces the need to inject functionality in the entire Nigerian education system through the infusion of ICT in the instructional delivery of different subject areas. Researches such as the ones already mentioned in the foregoing exposition have been in other disciplines, not in the French language. Similar studies among French language teachers are lacking. It is against this background that the present study was embarked upon to examine the ICT skills possessed by French language teachers for functional education. In doing that, the researcher formulated one research question and one hypothesis as shown below:

Research Question: To what extent do French language teachers in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones possess ICT skills for functional education?

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the mean ICT skills possession of French language teachers for functional education in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones.

Method

The descriptive survey design was employed in carrying out the investigation. The population of the study consisted of all the 46 French language teachers in Nsukka Education Zone and all the 39 French language teachers in Obollo-Afor Education Zone

in the public secondary schools in the areas. Both education zones are in Enugu State of Nigeria. Out of these, the researcher could only reach 37 of the teachers in Nsukka Zone and 31 of their counterparts in Obollo-Afor Zone. A 12-item questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The items were on such ICT skills like typesetting with a computer, surfing the Internet, preparing PowerPoint presentation, using Computer Aided Instruction, linking technology gadgets with lesson delivery, using electronic gadgets to download information, selecting appropriate ICT tools for lessons, incorporating students' use of ICT tools in lesson planning, using electronic games, participating in online professional development activities, integrating the audio version of the recommended textbooks in lesson planning and visiting of e-learning platforms.

The instrument was structured on a 4-point scale on which the respondents reacted to. The items on it were weighted thus: High Extent (HE) = 3.50 – 4.00, Moderate Extent (ME) = 2.50 – 3.49, Low Extent (LE) = 1.50 – 2.49 and No Extent (NE) = 0.00 – 1.49. It was validated by two specialists in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) and one specialist in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The three specialists were from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha method. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.76. The data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations for the research question and t-test for the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data obtained for the study are presented in tables 1 and 2 according to the research question and the hypothesis.

Table 1: Extent of the ICT Skills Possessed by French Language Teachers for Functional Education in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones

S/N	Item	N	Nsukka Zone		Decision	Obollo-Afor Zone		Decision	
			\bar{X}	SD		\bar{X}	SD		
1	Typeset with a computer	37	2.63	0.98	ME	31	2.57	1.11	ME
2	Prepare PowerPoint presentation	37	1.47	0.75	NE	31	1.43	0.96	NE
3	Use computer Aided instruction	37	1.45	0.72	NE	31	1.36	0.76	NE
4	Surf the internet for French language teaching resources	37	3.82	0.66	HE	31	3.79	0.72	HE
5	Link technology gadgets like smart phones with French language lesson delivery	37	2.93	0.81	ME	31	2.98	0.93	ME
6	Use electronic gadget like flash drive to download information accessed from the internet	37	2.50	0.94	ME	31	2.31	1.03	LE
7	Select appropriate ICT tools for French language lessons	37	2.53	0.97	ME	31	2.46	0.99	LE

8	Incorporate students' use of ICT tools in lesson planning	37	2.32	0.89	LE	31	2.41	0.94	LE
9	Use electronic French language learning games	37	1.42	0.67	NE	31	1.37	0.73	NE
10	Participate in online professional development activities	37	2.59	0.71	ME	31	2.52	0.85	ME
11	Integrate the audio version of the recommended French language textbooks in their lesson planning	37	2.48	0.73	LE	31	2.40	1.09	LE
12	Visit enlearning platforms for latest information on French language teaching and learning	37	2.56	0.76	ME	31	2.51	0.84	ME

Table 1 presents the extent to which French language teachers possess ICT skills for functional education. For the teachers in Nsukka Zone, their mean ICT skills possessions range from 3.82 to 1.42 with a corresponding standard deviation range of 0.98 to 0.66. The table shows that the teachers possess the ICT skill in item 4 to a high extent, the ones in items 1, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 12 to a moderate extent, the ones in items 8 and 11 to a low extent and the ones in items 2, 3 and 9 to a no extent. For the teachers in Obollo-Afor Zone, their ICT skills possessions range from 3.79 to 1.36 with a corresponding standard deviation range of 1.11 to 0.72. The table shows that the teachers possess the ICT skill item 4 to a high extent, the ones in items 1, 5, 10 and 12 to a moderate extent, the ones in items 6, 7, 8 and 11 to a low extent and the ones in items 2, 3 and 9 to no extent. The relatively better ICT skills possession by the teachers in Nsukka Zone is accompanied by lesser standard deviations they recorded in all the items.

Table 2: Summary of the t-test Analysis of the difference between the Mean ICT Skills Possession of French Language Teachers for Functional Education in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones

	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Education Zone Nsukka	37	28.70	0.58	4.18	66	1.996	Rejected
Obollo-Afor	31	28.11	0.63				

Table 2 shows that t-calculated is 4.18 and t-critical is 1.996. Since the calculated t-value is more than the critical t-value, we reject the null hypothesis. It means that the difference between the mean ICT skills possession for functional education of 28.70 by French language teachers in Nsukka Education Zone and 28.11 by the teachers in Obollo-Afor Zone is statistically significant.

Discussion

The result of the study showed that French teachers in both Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones possessed the ICT skill of surfing the Internet for French teaching resources to a high extent. Both groups of teachers also possess the skills of typesetting with a computer, linking technology gadgets with French language lesson delivery, participating in online professional development activities and visiting e-learning platforms to a moderate extent. The two groups possess the skills of incorporating students' use of ICT tools in lesson planning and integrating the audio versions of the recommended French textbooks in their lesson planning to a low extent. In a similar way, the two groups possess the skills of preparing PowerPoint presentation, using of computers Aided instruction and using of electronic French language learning games to a no extent. The areas of disparity are in the skills of using electronic gadgets to download information accessed from the internet and selecting appropriate tools for French language lessons. The teachers in Nsukka Zone possess these ICT skills to a moderate extent while the teachers in Obollo-Afor Zone possess them to a low extent.

From the results above, it is clear that the ICT skills possession of French language teachers for functional education in the two areas are still rudimentary. That is similar to the findings of Ezekoka, Isiozor and Anum (2017) that most teachers lack basic computer literacy. The reason for such result may be that the French teachers are not enthusiastic about acquiring the necessary ICT skills. This may be because they are not fully aware that if they must function effectively and be really relevant in a knowledge-based and globalized world of digital revolution, they should as a matter of urgency, make deliberate efforts to strengthen themselves with ICT related skills for functional education. This is particularly important because it is such skills that will equip the Nigerian French teachers to standardize their lesson delivery and prepare their students for present and possible future challenges in life. The attainment of such goal is still a distant prospect among the French language teachers in question. It is very worrisome that the teachers possess the skills of PowerPoint preparation and use of electronic French language games to no extent. That indicates that their classes lack the entertaining learning environment which the skills create. This increases the difficulties teachers may encounter in arousing the students' interest and in increasing their commitment to speak French fluently.

Another finding of the study is that the difference between the mean ICT skills possession for functional education by French language teachers in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Zones is statistically significant in favour of the former. This result shows that even though the general ICT skills possession of the teachers is low, some teachers are making some efforts to improve themselves in that regard. It suggests that the Federal Government's commencement of the ICT policy in 2001 has not been a total failure. One of the possible reasons for the better possession of the skills by the teachers of Nsukka Zone could be because of the fact that the zone has more urban areas than Obollo-Afor Zone. As a relatively more urbanized area with a university, it is easier for the teachers to see and familiarize themselves with ICT facilities, and in this way, happen to possess comparatively better ICT skills for functional education.

Conclusion

The French language teachers in Nsukka and Obollo-Afor Education Zones of Enugu State generally possess the ICT skill of surfing the Internet and other basic ones

that every other educated person is expected to possess for functional education. However, they do not possess some very important ICT skills that are deeply related to their career such as preparing PowerPoint presentation, using of computer Aided instruction, incorporating students' use of ICT tools in lesson planning, using of electronic French language learning games and integrating the audio version of the recommended French language textbooks in their lesson planning. The above situation portends that the teachers will find it very difficult to overcome the challenges of the modern day world and compete with their colleagues in other nations in the face of rapid development.

As the digital revolution occasioned by ICT has made the skill requirement of today's teacher more complex and sophisticated, if they do not make serious efforts to update their knowledge and skills, they may soon render themselves redundant and become professional misfits. Even though the French teachers in Nsukka Education Zone have a significant more ICT skills possession for functional education than their counterparts in Obollo-Afor as a result of the more urbanized nature of the area, the two groups of teachers are seriously ill-equipped for the season. The current state of their ICT skills possession is not in line with the demands of functional educational education that will provide the much needed manpower for industrial and technological growth of the country.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following:

1. ICTs should be fully integrated into the French language curricula to encourage technology mindset among the teachers.
2. The government should engage French language teachers in robust continuous capacity building programmes that will ensure their continued relevance in their job.
3. Efforts should be made by all the stakeholders in education to provide adequate ICT facilities in all the public secondary schools so that no school will be disadvantages on the account of its location.

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