



## Information communication technologies as enablers for the teaching and learning of English language in Omusati region

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### Abstract

The advent of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in education requires teachers to capitalise on the benefits of technologies for effective teaching and learning. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges affecting the integration of ICT into the teaching and learning of English as a second language. The study aimed at establishing a model for ensuring a successful integration of ICT into the mainstreams of teaching and learning. A case study design was used as a methodology for the research, whose sample comprised of teachers, school principals and lower primary learners of Omusati Region. The data was collected with open-ended questionnaires and observations. The study established that teachers' competencies, time constraints, lack of infrastructure and technical support as major constraints facing the successful integration of ICT in teaching and learning of English language. The study concluded that ICT was not optimally utilised for teaching and learning among schools of Omusati region due to a variety of operational shortfalls. The study recommended the provision of in-service training for teachers on the integration of ICT in their teaching activities, as well as the supply of required ICT infrastructure to schools, accompanied by continuous technical support services.

**Keywords:** curriculum, information communication and technologies (ICT), learning, teaching

### 1. Introduction: Background of the study

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is defined by Tino (2000) as related to the computers, videos, internet sources and other technologies used for communication. Education is a key determinant of any economy in any given society including Namibia. Hence, appropriate technologies should be optimally used to ensure the effectiveness of the education system. ICT provides an array of powerful tools that can help in transforming the present isolated, teacher-centered and text-bound classrooms into technology-enriched, student-focused and interactive knowledge environments. In education, computer technology has become so essential that governments have put ICT as one aspect of the curriculum emphasis. The utilization of ICT in education has recently started to appeal the potential and significant progress in language learning. ICT plays an essential role in the process of any language teaching program.

Technology helps to make teaching and learning more meaningful and interactive. Technology offers a lot of tools that can be used in the classroom to improve the quality of teaching and learning languages such as English language. English language teaching has been extensively influenced by the innovations made in the field of science and technology. It can be observed in the forms and mode of education. The present day English language pedagogy is related to integrated pedagogies making use of ICT.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2002) [7], languages is one of the significant element that affects international communication activities. Learners utilise different parts of English language skills such as listening, reading speaking and writing for their proficiency and communication. Ahmadi (2017) [11] stated that one of the important elements for learning is the method that the instructors use in their

classes to facilitate language learning. The application of advanced technological methods helps learners learn on the basis of their interest, satisfying both visual and auditory senses of learners. Technology assists learners in adjusting their own learning process, having access to a lot of information that their teachers are not able to provide.

Hartoyo (2008) [8] asserts that English language teaching has been shaped by the search for the one best method of teaching the language. Regardless of whether the focus of instruction has been reading, the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the language, grammar translation method, communication approach or other related linguistic issues, the attempts of the teaching profession have always been shaped by a desire to find a better way of teaching than the existing methods. The utilisation of ICT in language learning is to improve efficiency and effectiveness of learning that can improve the quality of understanding and mastery of the language studied. In other words, the integration of ICT in the field of language learning is inevitably known that the ICT and language learning are two aspects which support each other like two sides of the coin inseparable (Hartoyo, 2008) [8]. English is an influential subject in the school curriculum as well as in people's daily lives in Namibia. According to Dawes (2008) [4], ICT is an important part of education, as various technologies support education across the curriculum and provides opportunities for effective communication between teachers and learners. ICT is more useful when supporting learner-centered approach in instructing, developing higher thinking order skills and promoting collaborative activities between learners.

Dawes (2008) [4] stated that the quality of teaching and learning can be improved through identifying obstacles to the integration of the technologies in schools, arguing that

today a variety of technologies facilitate not only delivery of instruction but also learning process itself, contributing significantly to the acquisition and absorption of knowledge. Balanskat, Blamire and Kefala (2006) <sup>[2]</sup> confirms that ICT has a positive impact on student performance in primary schools, particularly in English language. Although a lot of innovations has been made to integrate ICT in teaching and learning of languages, the success record for the integration has not been impressive.

The status quo necessitated studies such as this one to discover the challenges facing successful integration of ICT in teaching and learning of English language. Omusati Region is among the regions whose performance in standardised national examinations is not impressive owing to barriers related English language. A successful integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of English language could improve the regional examination performance statistics phenomenally. This background makes a case for this study to investigate the challenges underlying the integration of ICT into teaching and learning of English language in Omusati Region, and establish measures for mitigating the challenges.

## 2. Research methods

The study was informed by a qualitative research approach as underpinned by a constructivism philosophy. A qualitative approach helped the researcher to interpret and understand the subject which was studied from the participants' own perspectives. By using a qualitative research approach, a rich descriptions about the focus of the study was obtained from the informants (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative research approach was carried out by way of a case study design, as an investigation in which an event related to an individual, group or community is studied in depth for a defined period of time (Leedy & Omrod 2005) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Case studies provides specific and detailed accounts of people in real situations about the phenomenon being studied, enabling researchers to understand ideas expressed more clearly, and acquire a holistic comprehension of what is studied. Hence, a case study investigation was the most appropriate design to use for this study, to enable the researcher to acquire rich information about the case that was studied. Participants were sampled using a purposive sampling technique, as a selection of the participants based on the researcher's judgement of who can provide the researcher with useful information about the subject of the study (Gay, Millis & Airasian 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>.

The sample comprised of School principal and English teachers from the sampled schools as well as selected learners. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to participants. The choice of open-ended questionnaires was meant to provide participants with an opportunity to provide as much information as possible. In addition to open-ended questionnaires, the researchers carried out observations of how ICT were being applied at schools and the challenges that faced the applications thereof.

The collected data was analysed using a thematic method, as the process of breaking down data into smaller units, determining their importance and putting the pertinent units together in a presentable format (Dearden, Micklewright & Vignoles 2011) <sup>[5]</sup>. The researchers identified the themes based on observation data and the data collected with the questionnaire. In producing the themes, the researchers have

read and re-read the data to understand the issues that were raised in relation to the focus of the study. Then the data was summarised and examined into depth, grouping similar data findings into identified themes.

The themes were interpreted and discussed to address the intents of the study. The trustworthiness of the results was established by member checking where participants were used to confirm the correctness of the findings established, and provide additional information as necessary. The researchers were granted permission to the research sites, and provided sufficient information to prospective participants before the sample was eventually selected. The data gathered was treated with confidentiality and presented in an anonymous fashion to protect the identities of the research sites and participants.

## 3. Discussion of Findings

As stated in the previous section, the collected data was analysed thematically and produced themes, as challenges that faced the integration of ICT into the teaching and learning of English language. The established themes relates to teachers' competencies, time constraints, ICT infrastructure and technical support personnel. The themes are interpreted and discussed next.

### 3.1 Teachers' competencies

The theme relates to the teachers' capabilities to make use of the available technologies appropriately and incorporate them into their teaching and learning activities. The researchers observed that some schools have technologies that could be used to facilitate English language teaching. The technologies that were available related to overhead projectors, smartboards, computers, laptops, tapes and radios. The study established that most of the English teachers were not literate in the use modern technologies, for purposes of integrating them into their teaching activities. Hence, teachers were not able to establish how their English language could be made easier if the applied technologies in the preparation of their lessons and teaching activities.

Some teachers have been teaching English language for a long time using traditional teaching methods and were hesitant about the integration of technologies into their teaching, stating that *"some of us have been teaching English language for many years before we were able to see the technologies brought to our school, urging us to integrate ICT into our teaching. However, we are not trained on how to operate the technologies, thus we have no ideas on how to integrate them in our teaching and learning"*. It becomes clear that teachers were not competent with the use of technologies due to shortfalls related to training requirements.

Training teachers would have ensured that teacher were able to operate the computers and overhead projectors and could use them confidently during their lesson presentations. The training is essential to ensure that teachers are capable of operating the technologies and mindful of the functionalities with which to perform with different technologies such as lesson preparation, designing assessment activities, keeping records of lesson plans and assessment results, accessing relevant online videos to facilitate teaching, enlarging content for more visibility, and so on. English language teachers could use the computers to download grammar software which they can use to train learner on grammar

rules, as well as assessing the extent to which learners have mastered the use of grammar by running learners' written work into grammar software. Without an appreciation of what teachers were able to perform with the technologies in relation to their teaching responsibilities, they were not going to embrace technologies to the required extent.

### 3.2 Time constraints

The study established that English teachers did not have enough time to plan their lessons, and specifically apply technologies in their teaching activities. Unlike traditional teaching methods that require teachers to move from the staffroom to the classes for lesson presentation, the use of technologies require extra time for obtaining them from the laboratories and set them up in the classes prior to lesson presentations. Obtaining technologies from the laboratory and setting them up in the classroom took up a considerable amount of time for the lesson presentation. In addition, there was no extra time for preparation of the next lesson, because the same time a previous lesson ends, it was exactly the same time another lesson has to start. Readily available technologies in every class would have ensured optimal use of time by teachers and successful integration of technologies into their teaching practices.

### 3.3 ICT infrastructures

The theme relates to the availability of the facilities, tools and equipment related to the required technologies at schools. The study established none of the schools that formed part of the study has adequate ICT essentials in place as required. Observation established that there were few ICT tools in the computer laboratories at the research sites related to computers and printers sparsely located, giving an impression that the ICT tools were not enough to be used by the high number of teachers at the schools. At some schools, the only computer available was the one the secretary was in charge of for executing secretarial duties, with limited exposure to teaching staff members.

The impression of insufficiency ICT tools and equipment was supported by one participants revealing that *"the ICT tools we have at our school is not enough, as the available ICT tools have to be used not only by language teachers, but by all teachers at school"*, which revelation was supported by other participants in their responses. This means that the available ICT tools such as computers were not enough and readily available to be used by teachers to prepare their lesson, design assessment activities and for record keeping. It was observed that English teachers were using very old tape cassette to conduct listening comprehension activities with learners.

The speakers of the old tape sounds unclear to the listener's, which made it difficult to learners to pick up the words, phrases and meanings they were required to have captured during the activity. Another radio of a recent version could improve the listening comprehension activity by ensuring that the speakers provided a much clear voice, projected to all corners of the classroom without flaws. In addition, a computer connected to speakers could have been used to play speeches or presentations, while requiring learners to listen and attend to questions. The unavailability of modern versions of technologies compromised the teaching of English languages among schools.

It was observed that teachers were willing to be trained on the operation of ICT tools. However, they lamented the

limited ICT resources at their schools. *"We are strongly willing to gain computer literacy by observing from colleagues who are computer literate skills. The only problem prohibiting us is the lack of enough resources such as computers to practice, as without practice, we can easily forgot what a colleague demonstrated to us"*. The study established that a lot of technologies are required related to *"transparencies, printer, photocopy machine and overhead projector"*. Some schools have the old projector which use transparencies, hence they lamented the lack of transparencies that they are used to. However, given the new modern projectors, teachers could connect them to computers and present much clear illustrations as compared to outdated projectors with their transparencies. The shortage of enough computers and modern overhead projectors is failing teachers from integrating appropriate technologies in their teaching and learning activities.

The shortage of ICT tools did not only impact negatively on teachers but also on learners, as *"there are only four computers in the laboratory that our teachers use to search tasks for us, and learners do not have access to the computers"*. This implies that learners cannot use the technologies to gain additional information beyond lesson presentation by the teacher. Adequate ICT tools such as computers would have ensured that learners could seek further clarity at the computer laboratory and acquire a holistic understanding of the lesson that was presented.

The study also discovered that some of the research sites have no internet connectivity, whereas those with internet connectivity, the connection was not dependable as it was often weak unable to facilitate internet searches and downloading of instructional materials. The provision of a stronger connectivity would have ensured instant access to teaching and learning resources as available on internet. Some teachers resorted to using their smart phone to search related content on the internet. In addition, some schools do not have electricity, making a computer which was donated gathering dust in the library, stating that *"we do not have electricity at our school. We are still waiting for our electricity transform to be approved to get electricity"*. This implies that electricity provision was key to the use of technologies that were available at schools, the absence of which implies that technologies were not to be used for anything.

### 3.4 Technical support services

One of the challenges facing the successful integration of technologies in teaching English language, was the unavailability of technical support personnel. Observational evidence reveals some computers at the research sites were dysfunctional and none of the teachers was able to offer technical assistance in respect of fixing the technical errors. Any technical glitch was reported to the Regional office, and it could take months to be attended to due to bureaucratic nature of the administrative system in place. Printers were also not relied on often they failed to print. This implies that English teacher were not able to type the assessment activities and print them out as available technologies were often characterised by technical shortfalls. The availability of skilled technical personnel at schools would have ensured that technical problems were addressed as soon as they occurred, which would have promoted integration of technologies into the teaching of English language.

#### 4. Summary

Consequently, the study revealed that the integration of technologies into teaching of English language was indeed faced by challenges, which made the integration to be less successful. Teachers were not capacitated to use technologies that were made available at their schools. As a result, teachers did not know how to operate the technologies at schools, and did not have an appreciation of the various functionalities that comes with the technologies and as appropriate to their teaching activities. Time was not made available for the set-up of technologies for teaching, giving the limited time allocated per lesson presentation, making teachers resort to their traditional way teaching which they believed it managed time better. The provision of ICT infrastructures among rural schools was not supportive to successful integration of ICT into teaching activities, as schools had short falls of ICT equipment and tools. The lack of computers with internet connectivity meant that teachers were not able to access useful teaching and learning resources on the internet. In addition, schools did not have qualified Information Technology (IT) Specialist to attend to malfunctioning technologies.

#### 5. Recommendations

To ensure that ICT is successfully integrated into the teaching of English Language, the following recommendations were made:

- a. The Director for the directorate of education in the region should design ICT training interventions to capacitate English language teachers with the competencies to optimally use technologies in their teaching activities. The training will ensure that teachers are able to operate the technologies and are mindful of the various functions they can perform with the different technologies.
- b. School principals should ensure that the time tabling of lesson presentations provide extra time for setting up technologies, so that no lesson presentation in respect of its time allocation.
- c. The Director of the directorate of education and the Education Officers responsible for English language, should spearhead the sourcing of essential technological requirements for the successful teaching of English language.
- d. School principal should advocate for the employment of IT Specialist at their schools to attend to technical shortcomings as soon as they are experienced at the schools, and promote uninterrupted use of technologies to facilitate language teaching and learning.

It is hoped that the consideration of the above proposals and subsequent implementation, would make technologies potential enablers of successful English language teaching and learning in the twenty-first century.

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