

Assessing the Need for Mobile Communication Mediated Instructional Strategy in the Teaching of Writing Skills

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Abstract: This study investigates the need for the use of mobile communication instructional strategy in the teaching of essay writing skills in the senior secondary schools. It also investigates language teachers perception on the use of mobile phones in teaching writing skills. Descriptive survey method was used to elicit information from 100 language teachers in secondary schools in Nigeria. The study attempts to find out if mobile phones Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) will enhance students writing skills in essay writing with special references to expression, content generation, organisation, tense and punctuation. The findings of the study show that GSM offers opportunity for the teaching of writing skills specifically essay writing. The respondents accept that the use of mobile phones (GSM) will enhance students' ability to generate main ideas and organise the ideas. It will also enable the teachers' to identify and correct errors committed by students in tenses and give spontaneous feedback to the students. As a result of this study, it was recommended among other findings that language teacher can use GSM to teach writing skills in secondary schools especially when employing individualized and programmed instructional strategy.

Key words: Mobile communication, writing skills, expression, instructional strategy

INTRODUCTION

The world is dynamic just as language which human beings used to express their ideas, feelings, emotions and reports in all its ramifications. One of the recent developments in the world today is the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). There are some equipment the are generally referred to as ICT. Some of them are radio, television satellite equipment, digital multimedia and telephone (cellular). Recent innovation in technology identified ICT with new communication media like mobile telephony, computers and video conferencing facilities. With the improvement in technology ICT makes it possible to process, manage and transfer information. Modern information communication technology makes it possible for people to store, process, retrieve and transfer information. ICT revolution is central to globalization and the dynamic change in all aspect of human existence. The issue of immense progress made in the field of information and communication technology improving access to information is noted all over the world. The sad thing is that poor nations are finding it difficult to derive maximum benefit from ICT because of the state of their economy, poverty and level of literacy.

Bandeled (2006) says that ICT has played significant roles all over the nations and in society's ability to produce, access, adopt and apply information. It has

helped immensely in knowledge acquisition through computer and internet exploration therefore, it has enhanced transfer and acquisition of knowledge within the shortest period.

Most of the developing world Nigeria in particular has not derived maximum benefits in the use of ICT especially in the area of education. The reason for this is not far fetched. There are myriads of problems ranging from lack of electricity, high cost of computer, high rate of computer illiteracy, lack of internet facilities in secondary schools and even universities. In addition to this the teaching of ICT is not seriously intensified because of some of the reasons enumerated above. The resultant effect of this is a high rate of illiteracy in computer education.

In recent years, awareness about the need for adequate knowledge in ICT is being intensified as demands are being made as to the core qualifications of individuals as well as their understanding and knowledge of the consequences of the introduction of information technology for work, organization, of a company and education.

Ogunrinde (2006) says that modern societies are becoming increasingly dependent on information and the processing of knowledge, great demands are therefore, made that the individual should have a solid and broad educational foundation on which to build. The implication

of this is that ICT curricular should be developed and integrated to school activities in countries that have not fully integrated ICT into their educational programmes so that their citizens can acquire ICT skills.

The issue of developing professional skills in ICT is very important. These skills are obtained mainly through prolonged experience in use. This means that each country must develop a strategy that the educational system will be arranged to allow pupils and students have access to and become accustomed to regarding ICT as a tool to be used in the learning process.

In this vein, new pedagogic opportunities must be explored and tested, just as new forms of communication must be established among pupils, students and teachers. It is no gainsaying that ICT opens up opportunities for a more individualized form of teaching in which pupils and students can themselves control learning process when the teacher is not necessarily present. In this regard, teaching must be organized in such a way that learners learn to learn and to accept responsibility for their own education. Educational courses based on ICT can be developed to assist everyone in new and more effective ways such as reading and writing. Through the use of ICT weak students can be assisted. It is with this assertion that the need to use mobile communication mediated instructional strategy to teach writing skills is being considered in this study.

One of the impacts of information technology on the developing world is the introduction of mobile communication system otherwise known as Global System for Mobile of communication (GSM).

The introduction of GSM in Nigeria is a recent innovation in the communication system. It is not more than 5 years old in the country. The use of GSM is widely accepted by nearly everybody in the society. It is common to see cell phone with secondary school students and even with primary school pupils whose parents can afford it.

The GSM is used for various purposes by individuals depending on the individuals interest. Some use it to play games; while some are interested in sending messages either verbal or written text. The GSM is designed as a multimedia devices and it is very easy to use.

The study is set out to find out if the use of mobile phone specifically text message will enhance individual students ability to write good composition. Specifically, the study investigates students' ability to generate ideas, content, organize ideas, express their views on the ideas and the use of punctuation marks.

Statement of the problem: Concern scholars have been complaining about poor performance of secondary school

students in the use of English language in Nigeria. Reports from Chief examiners of public examinations bodies like West African examinations Council 2004, 2005, 2005, 2006 reveal that students are failing English Language at an alarming rate.

From the Table 1, one can see that the percentages of students who obtained credit pass in each year of observation were greater than those who failed except in 2006. Ubahakwe (1991) among many scholars have complained about the poor teaching methods employed by the Language teachers. It was also observed that most secondary school teachers were complaining about the upsurge of students' population and that they were unable to give individual attention to these students.

This study intends to investigate whether there would be improvement in students' achievement in writing skills if they were given individual attention through mobile communication strategy by their Language teachers.

Research questions: As a result of the problems raised above, the following research question was raised. Will there be any difference in the achievement of the students in the components of essay writing if they were taught with individualized instructional strategy through GSM.

Research hypothesis: Based on the research questions stated above, the following research hypothesis was formulated.

There is no significance difference in the achievement of students in the components of essay writing if they were taught with mobile communication mediated instructional strategy in essay writing.

Literature review: The use of English language as a means of communication is vital to the existence of Nigeria as a country. Kolawole (1998) says that the language is an official language and a language which unites the nation because of the multilingual nature of the country. It is sad enough to note that a country with about 400 languages finds it difficult to fashion out a national language. The country depends on English Language which is a 2nd language for communication in almost all facets of life that brings the ethnic groups together.

Table 1: Comparison of students' performance in english language for 3 years

	Credit pass (%)	Pass (%)	Fail (%)	Absent (%)
2004	29.59	29.63	37.61	1.43
2005	25.63	34.48	36.93	1.44
2006	32.48	34.13	29.65	1.38

Source: WAEC reports

The situation above shows the importance of English language to Nigeria national development in all facets. English language is taught in Nigeria as a medium of instruction and as a school subject. The Nigeria National policy on Education 2004, restricts the use of the Language of immediate environment as Language of instruction to the early years of the child's education, while English language is taught as a subject. English language of course is recommended as medium of instruction at the upper classes of the primary school and it is also taught as a subject on its own.

In addition to the above, it seems as if Nigeria political and educational ideologies of the government favour the use of English language than the indigenous language because the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that the business of the national assembly shall be conducted in English Language, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba, when adequate arrangements have been made therefore. Since 1999, no adequate arrangements have been made therefore Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba cannot be used at the national assemblies.

From the above, English Language is playing significant roles in the country therefore, it connotes that an average Nigerian must be proficient users of the English Language. This suggests that Nigeria must be able to use English Language in all its forms especially writing and speaking.

These are essential means of communication. Akindele and Adegbite (1999) say that English Language is important because it is the Language of instruction in schools, the language of business and commerce, the language of internal communication among Nigeria's of differing language backgrounds and of course the language of international communication. Despite the fact that English language performs the functions enumerated above, many Nigeria students are still failing English language in examinations. Olaofe (1990) observes that some students after 6 years of secondary education could neither read nor write. This has led to high failure rate in English language examinations and failures in other subjects. Such failures are occasioned by poor mastery and performance in English; thereby reveal the close connection between communication competence and educational performance generically.

In spite of the fact that English Language still plays very dominant roles in the educational system and a subject-language in the curriculum, there is evidence everywhere in the educational system that the standard of English expression is very poor and students lack the proper knowledge of the communicative tasks at various levels of education (Akere, 1993).

The focus of this study is on the means of improving the communicative competence of the Nigeria students in

English Language through the teaching of writing via Information and Communication Technology ICT. Specifically the Global System for Mobile communication GSM.

Oyinloye (2007) says that information dissemination is very important in human activities and it is a unique feature that distinguishes human beings from animals. The world is currently witnessing the sporadic use of scientific and industrial methods to aid transfer and exchange of information. The implication of this is that ICT can aid exchange of ideas in writing skills between teachers and students through the use of telephones, cables and internet.

The term Information and Communication Technology can be defined as the use of computers, ancillary equipment, software, hardware, services and resources interconnected together to form network that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information. The ICT is therefore, a means of sharing facilities or equipment relevant to enhancing dissemination of information either through, verbal or written form.

The thrust of the study is the use of GSM to aid students in acquisition of writing skills. Telephone (cellular) is prominent among ICT. It has facility for text messages. Some mobile phones can accommodate about 1,000 characters an average of about 10-15 words. Per line which can be written severally. Most mobile phones can accommodate 160 characters per page an average of about 10-words which can be written severally. Some mobile phones can accommodate 3 pages at a time. This implies that a text messages can be written and sent to the receiver. Some mobile phones have the facilities that will enable both the sender and receiver download messages from mobile phones to computer and also transfer messages to mobile phones from computer.

Use of mobile phones for instructional purposes in essay writing: The mobile phone can be used to teach writing skills especially composition to students in both small and large classes. The teacher can employ many methods. Some of the methods are discussion, reading and academic writing; others are individualized instruction and programmed instruction.

The teacher needs to identify the topics he wants to teach the students irrespective of the number of students. The lessons initially must be held in a classroom interaction situation in sessions. This will familiarize the students with the topic, purpose of the study and procedure to disseminate their information in terms of assignment through their mobile phones.

During classroom interaction, the teacher will engage the students in discussion on specific topics, reading materials can be distributed to the students to further enrich their knowledge about the subject matter.

In addition the teacher can teach the students in groups. The programme of instruction will include packages of linguistic skills which will enhance students writing skills. The linguistic package may consist of:

- Grammatical rules-tense, number, comparison.
- Lexis-use of dictionary, idioms, collocation.
- Syntax-Sentences, simple, complex compound, clauses.
- Phrases and stylistic problems-wordiness, punctuation marks paragraph and paragraph development definition and types and hints on essay writing.
- Outlining.

The teacher can proceed to engage the students in essay writing which may be written in the class.

The students may be provided with written instructions on many topics from which the teacher will ask them to write essays. A topic has to be treated at a time. The teacher will decide on the number of words and paragraphs. The teacher may ask the students to write full essay on the given topic or specific paragraphs which can be introductory, transitional or concluding paragraphs on specific topic.

It is also possible to use GSM for individualized instruction. If the teacher diagnosed the problems of the students he can group students with similar problems and teach them with packages of instructional materials which he has designed to remediate the problems he has identified. Based on the remedial lessons, the teacher can give assignments which the students can do individually using their GSM to submit it to the teacher.

The teacher needs a special GSM that can be downloaded on computer from where he can do necessary corrections and print for the students to read. This will serve as permanent record for student's references. On the other hand, he can do the correction on his own mobile phone and send it to the student who will read the message and note the corrections which the teacher has made.

The GSM also can be used for programmed instruction in writing skills. Programmed instruction is a technique of teaching in a sequence of controlled steps. It is also called programmed learning. It gives room for planning instructional process in a reproducible sequence of events which will produce measurable and consistent learning by students.

In using GSM for programmed instruction in writing skills, the teacher needs to define the purpose and the

goals to be attained by the students. In addition the teacher has to state the activities the learners will perform in order to achieve the goals and also how the attainment of the goals can be measured.

The programmed instruction must be available in a format that can be used repeatedly in order to assure its consistency. The programme can be written in form of outline or in units which can be handled within a reasonable time, that is period of learning. It can also be written in terms of tasks to be carried out by students which can be measured.

A programmed instruction can be used for teaching writing skills. Such a programme can be divided into 5 phases.

- The introduction phase.
- Transitional phase.
- Concluding phase.
- Structural phase.
- Mechanical accuracy phase.

The teacher will also develop outline that will enable the students to write in paragraphs. Other linguistic variables that can aid sentence construction and paragraphing should form part of the design.

The student can now be taught and tested according to the units in each phase. The teacher is to lead the students through the programme stage by stage and gives the students assignments which they can do and submit through their GSM.

The feedback of such assignments can be given to the students through their GSM or the teacher can download the original message through computer, mark and distribute to students when the class is in session.

The use of GSM will give the teacher opportunities to give assignments to individual students through text messages. The assignment can be based on the weaknesses identified in the research, which the student has sent through GSM.

The student will have the opportunity to go through the corrections made by his teacher. The use of GSM if used in this sense, can aid immediate feedback between individual students and the teacher. It is perceived that it is not as costly as programmed instruction through computer programming because GSM is readily available with individual students than the computer sets.

In order to verify the perceptions of Language teachers, on the use of GSM to teach writing skills, specifically essay writing, a survey was carried out based on the research hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population of the study was all the English Language teachers at the secondary schools in Ekiti. The population is about 1,500 out of which 100 teachers were randomly selected for the study.

The study used a self reporting questionnaire to elicit information from the teachers. The questionnaire elicit information about the knowledge of the teachers on the use of GSM. Individualized instruction and programmed instruction. Those who were knowledgeable in the above variables were chosen to constitute the 100 samples.

The questionnaires elicit information on the use of GSM to teach the following writing skills, generation of content, main ideas, supporting ideas topic sentence.

Expression, concise and precision in the use of words, tense, collocation construction of sentence varieties and idioms:

- Organisation-organizing the main ideas and supporting ideas into paragraphs.
- Mechanical accuracy-punctuations.
- Method of data collection and analysis.

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the secondary school teachers who were language teachers and are literate in computer and the use of (handsets) cellular phones.

The questionnaire was filled and returned to the researcher the same day. The questionnaire which was constructed on a Likert rating scale were scored, collated and subjected to t-test statistics which was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The only hypothesis generated for the study states that there is no significant difference in the achievements of students in the components of essay writing if they were taught with mobile communication mediated instructional strategy in essay writing through GSM.

The result obtained is presented in Table 2. The Table 2 shows that there is significance difference between those who hold the opinion that GSM can be used to teach students essay writing and those who did not accept because the t calculated is greater than the table value.

Table 2: Difference between teachers perception that GSM is good to teach essay writing and those who perceived that it is not good

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	d.f.	t-cal	t-value	Sig
Opinions about GSM for teaching essay							
Good method	100	23.90	5.63				
Not suitable method	100	14.84	4.24	99	10.50	1.96	0.000

DISCUSSION

The result of the data analysed in hypothesis one shows that there is significant difference between the perception of the language teachers about the use of GSM to teach essay writing to secondary school students.

The outcome of the study favours those who perceived that GSM can be used to teach writing skills in essay writing. The respondents through answer to questionnaire and oral interview supported the use of GSM to teach the following writing skills, expression, generation of content, organization of contents to main and supporting ideas, outlining and punctuation marks. They however, agreed that the use of GSM will give room for teachers to pay attention to individual students by marking their works and give feedback spontaneously. Those who perceived the use of GSM as a good method of teaching essay writing however, emphasize that it could be better done with small classes than large classes.

On the other hand, those who perceived that GSM is not a good method for teaching essay writing believe that it will be difficult to teach some writing skills. They claimed that students' expression, generation of contents, organisation of contents into main ideas might not be adequately assessed. They however, agreed that GSM can enhance student's ability to use punctuation marks correctly, write outline and generate short sentences. The results of the data analysed in respect of this study favours the use of GSM to teach essay writing in senior secondary schools. It also supports the use of individualized and programmed instructional strategy through the use of GSM. The responses to both questionnaire and oral interview indicate that feedback can be immediate and that student's attention can be drawn to the errors committed spontaneously.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to find out the need to include the use of GSM in the secondary school curriculum for the teaching of writing skills. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the use of GSM to teach writing skills could be included in the secondary schools curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings of the study, it is recommended that the use of GSM to teach essay writing to small size classes or students in small groups in secondary schools should be encouraged. It is also recommended that the teachers who will use this method

must be computer literate and have adequate knowledge in handling individualized instructional strategy and programmed instruction.

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