

ONLINE INNOVATIONS: THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

NGOZI JOVITA N. UMELO, Ph.D

Department Of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts

Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

ngoziuemelo80@gmail.com / ngozi.umelo@alvanikoku.edu.ng

Phone Number: 08066058199

ROSECOLETTE N. EWURUM, Ph.D

Department Of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts

Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

colrin68@yahoo.com

08063523211

&

OLUCHI STEPHANIE ONUABUOBI, Ph.D

Department Of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts

Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

oluchi.onuabuobi@alvanikoku.edu.ng

08069272330

Abstract

The emergence of online language teaching and learning has invigorated learner's attitude towards the acquisition of knowledge. The digital approaches have paved way for individual and group learning accessibility. This paper explores the various online innovations in language teaching and learning with more emphasis on their accessibility and effectiveness. The study aims to highlight the prospects and challenges in language teaching and learning. The study anchors on the connectivism theory of George Siemens (2005), Connectivism theory which serves as a response to the limitations of traditional learning theory. Responses through questionnaire and oral interview from teachers and students of four tertiary institutions in Imo State constitute the data for analysis through the eclectic design of quantitative and qualitative approach. The study reveals that language teachers and students are interested in adopting and using online innovations in teaching and learning. It is also revealed that the online innovations enhances understanding, supports student-centred learning which widens their horizon and makes learning easier. The study concludes that online innovations which facilitate learning have gone miles in revolutionizing the traditional approach of teaching and learning. Therefore, the study recommends that educational institutions, curriculum planners and stakeholders should encourage online innovations to harness its potentials for better production.

Keywords: Online Innovations, Language Teaching, Language Learning, Digital Approaches, Connectivism.

INTRODUCTION

The digital approach of language teaching and learning has globally helped in education acquisition. The need for daily communication and information necessitates the innovation of online method. The online innovations have gradually and consistently reduced the traditional methods of teaching and learning. This transformation is more prevalent in the aspect of language teaching. Language education is obviously a vital tool not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties and economic relationships (Anifowoshie & Onjewu, 2001). Hence the unavoidable shift from the ancient traditional method of teaching to the recent digitalized method. According to Olagundoye (2014), the contemporary society is shifting from old tradition of teaching and learning to a technological advancement in which virtually all activities are carried out in advanced technological manner.

Online innovations to an extent have taken the lead in facilitating learning both at the formal and informal setting. The innovations significantly have shown remarkable transformation in language teaching as the learning Apps are being embraced by both teachers and learners in the 21st century due to its results in knowledge acquisitions, collaborations and enhanced linguistic skills. Language learning has gone beyond the traditional approach where the teacher must stand in front of the class facing the students to teach thereby making the students passive learners. Therefore, it is the intent of this study to explore the online innovations, prospects and challenges in language teaching and learning.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- ✓ highlight online innovations in language teaching and learning
- ✓ access the prospects of enhancing language teaching and learning
- ✓ examine the challenges learners encounter in the process of online language learning.

Conceptual Clarifications

Online innovations are the digital technologies, tools, platforms and forums created to facilitate language teaching and learning. The innovations include; online language courses, virtual reality (VR), language learning apps, augmented reality (AR), social media-based language learning communities and so on. Online innovations can also be referred to as the novel approaches through which knowledge is acquired. Bax (2003) avers that technology should be normalized in language teaching. This implies that the online innovations be combined smoothly into daily teaching practices. Bax proposes three-phase model for technology integration in language teaching. The three phases include;

- Awareness: By this, teachers become aware of the potentials of technology in language teaching.
- Exploration: Teachers are to experiment with different technologies and tools.
- Integration: Technology becomes a normal part of teaching practices.

Furthermore, Bax (2003) elaborates on three key points of online innovations. They include;

- a. **Focus on Pedagogy:** The emphasis here is on the importance of pedagogy in technology-enhanced language learning. Bax avers that technology should be used to support sound pedagogical principles rather than the other way round.

- b. **Teacher Training:** Bax identifies the need for teacher training in technology-enhanced language teaching. He asserts that teachers need to develop the skills and confidence to integrate technology effectively into their teaching practices.
- c. **Learner Autonomy:** Bax supports learner autonomy in technology-enhanced language learning. He stresses that learners should be encouraged to take charge of their own learning using technology to assess resources and support their learning.

Critical Assessment of Technology

On this, Bax stresses on the importance of critically assessing technology in language teaching. He argues that teachers and learners should take note of the potential benefits and limitations of technology thereby applying it in such a way that supports learning. In adopting Bax's assertions on online innovations in language teaching and learning, educators can develop and improve on more nuanced understanding of how technology can be used to support language learning. Guo (2023) avers that mobile learning technologies can improve students' achievement.

Andrade's (2017) study on Online English language Learning: Theory-Based Course Design and Pedagogy, demonstrates how online English language courses based on distance Education, learning and language acquisition theories and related pedagogical approaches can result not only in improved linguistic skill but also broader educational outcomes. The importance of the approach is its focus on how to learn and how to enhance learning rather simply on what to learn.

Levy (1997) asserts that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is a subset of technology enhanced language learning which encompasses a broader range of technologies and approaches. Also, that technology should be used to support language learning and not to drive it. its main focus is using technology to support language learning goals than allowing technology to dictate the learning process. Levy further emphasizes on teachers training being essential for effective technology integration. The importance of computer assisted language learning is for developing teachers' technical and pedagogical skills. However, in as much as digital technologies are accepted, there is still need for human gathering in the course of teaching and learning hence Warschauer (1995) assertions on online innovations. The assertions include;

- Technology can facilitate language learning but it's not a replacement for human interaction: By this, Warschauer argues that technology can support language learning but it cannot replace the importance of human interaction and social engagement in the learning process.
- Effective technology integration requires a focus on learner needs and goals: The emphasis here according to Warschauer is prioritizing learner needs and goals when integrating technology into language teaching. Also, to ensure that technology supports learners' individual goals and needs.
- Technology can exacerbate existing inequities if not used carefully: Warschauer highlights the importance of considering issues of equity and access when integrating technology into language teaching and ensuring that technology does not exacerbate existing inequities.

In language teaching and learning, online innovations are the digital ways of teaching and learning language. Here are some of the transforming approaches:

1. **Virtual Conference:** This is the innovation that enables researchers and practitioners from far/near to gather online to share and exchange language teaching methodologies.
2. **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):** This brings about revolution in language learning by offering flexible and accessible courses to learners worldwide. Platforms such as coursera, edx and Udemy provide a range of language courses.
3. **Language Learning Apps:** These Apps offer a variety of features and resources as educational tools to help in language learning. Most of the Apps provide structured lessons and courses that cover grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and other language skills. Apps like Duolingo, Babble and Rosetta stone use gamification, interactive exercise and AI-powered chatbots to make language learning engaging and fun.

Based on the language learning Apps, Date (2022) opines that “Duolingo is a multiple language learning App which can be used to learn English language”. It is completely a free learning App which takes a general survey about the learners’ knowledge about English language, the learner’s goals and purpose behind learning the language. Duolingo offers a lot of exercises including translation tasks, multiple-choice questions and speaking exercises with voice recognition. It is known for its user-friendly interface and flexibility in terms of learning pace. Despite Duolingo being primarily designed to suit self-study App for language learners, it can also be used as a supplementary tool by language teachers to support the classroom teaching,

4. **Online Language Exchange Platforms:** This platform paves way for native speakers of diverse origin to connect for language exchange and practice.
5. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML):** AI tool enhances personalize language learning and provides real-time feedback to learners through language learning chatbots and speech recognition software.
6. **Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):** These technologies are explored for immersive language learning experiences. The exploration includes; virtual field trips and interactive language lessons.

All these online innovations provide novel opportunities for language learners and teachers to connect, collaborate and improve language skills in engaging and effective ways.

Prospects of Online Innovations

The prospects of online innovations according to Stephen Krashen (1981) include:

- **Increased Accessibility:** The accessibility of online platforms and resources have increased the rate of language learning conveniently.
- **Personalized Learning:** Language learners have personalized learning to individual’s needs and styles due to technologies.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Online language learning enhances cultural exchange, understanding and global connectivity.
- **Career Opportunities:** Being proficient in multiple languages as a result of online innovations that aid learning enhances career prospects in different industries such as business and education.

- **Brain Benefits:** Cognitive benefits are expanded through language learning. Some of the benefits include; improved memory, problem-solving and multitasking

These are the expectations of language learners through the digital innovations which is trendy globally. Therefore, it is pertinent for learners to be acquainted with the changes and procedures.

Challenges of Online Innovations

Challenges abound in online innovations. Howard Gardner (1983) outlines some of the challenges as thus:

- **Language Barriers:** Language learning is hampered when there are limited access to quality and effective language instructions, resources and digital technologies.
- **Motivation and Engagement:** Online innovations do not have provision for language learners to be motivated and engaged. Unlike the traditional classroom settings where learners are reinforced through teacher's motivational strategies.
- **Assessment and Evaluation:** This is challenging in the sense that language proficiency and teaching effectiveness cannot be assessed and evaluated by any educator. Learners are subject to what they acquire on their own.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity:** It is really challenging to tackle the needs of learners from diverse cultural linguistic backgrounds. Learners are restricted to their cultural and linguistic environment.
- **Technological Limitations:** Regardless of the various benefits of technology, there are still challenges and limitations. Such limitations include; technical hitches, network failure, limited internet access, outdated software and financial constraints.

Theoretical Framework

The study anchors on connectivism theory of George Siemens (2005) which serves as a response to the limitations of traditional learning theories.

The Principles of Connectivism Theory

- ✓ **Learning is a Network Process:** This principle perceives learning as a process of connecting and navigating networks of knowledge, people and resources.
- ✓ **Knowledge is Distributed:** By this, knowledge is no longer seen as residing within individuals rather as a channel through which information is accessed and shared.
- ✓ **Learning is a Process of Pattern Recognition:** This theory emphasizes on the importance of recognizing patterns and connections between pieces of information.
- ✓ **Technology Plays a Critical Role:** Connectivism admits the significant impact of technology on the learning process especially in terms of access to information and networks.

Implications for Learning and Teaching

- ✓ **Learner Autonomy:** The emphasis of connectivism lies on the importance of learner autonomy by encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

- ✓ **Self-Directed Learning:** The theory of connectivism promotes self-directed learning whereby learners pilot the networks of knowledge and resources alone to achieve their learning objectives.
- ✓ **Teacher as a Facilitator:** The teacher's traditional role shifts from being a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator by guiding learners in their navigation of networks and connections to acquire knowledge.
- ✓ **Emphasis on Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Connectivism theory highlights the importance of developing critical thinking and problem-solving strategies and skills. This is to enable learners to navigate complex networks and make connections between disparate pieces of information.

Criticism and Limitations of Connectivism

1. **Overemphasis on Technology:** Connectivism undermines the importance of human interaction and social context. The theory places much emphasis on technology.
2. **Lack of Clear Boundaries:** It is criticized that connectivism do define boundaries and learning goals because of the focus on networks and connections.
3. **Potential for Information Overload:** Learners can find it difficult to discern relevant information from irrelevant ones as a result of excess information available within the network.

In all, connectivism provides a unique perspective to learning, outlining the importance of networks, connections and complexity. Despite its limitations, connectivism can inform teaching practices and learning design particularly in online and blended learning environments.

Research Methodology

This study adopts the research design of eclectic derived from both quantitative and qualitative approach which aims at obtaining data from participants and analyzing. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire and oral interview. Forty (40) participants (teachers and students) from four different tertiary institutions in Imo State were selected for the study.

Questionnaire/Oral Interview

1. What is the perception of technology in language teaching and learning?
2. Do language teachers and learners have interest in adopting online innovations?
3. How do online innovations enhance the teaching and learning ability of users?
4. Does it facilitate or hinder language teaching and learning?

Quantitative Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the perception of technology in language teaching and learning?

Table 1: Perception of Technology in Language Teaching and Learning (PTLTL)

Perception	Participants No	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Trendy Source	39	11	28.2	28.2%
Adoption/Encouraged	39	9	23.1%	51.3%
Willingness	39	7	17.9%	69.2%
Readiness	39	6	15.4%	84.6%
Lacks Reinforcement	39	6	15.4%	100

From the table above, thirty-nine (39) out the forty (40) copies of questionnaire were filled and returned. On the perception of technology in language teaching and learning, out of the thirty-nine (39) participants both teachers and learners, eleven (11) which implied 28.2% affirms that technology in language teaching and learning has become a trendy source of learning independently. The participants confirm that it has gained ground in language teaching and learning. The participants' response proved that nine (9) that was 23.1% teachers and students were eager to adopt the innovations in language teaching and encouraged learners towards the adoption and usage. Concerning the willingness, seven (7) which represented 17.9% expressed willingness in the use of online innovations in language teaching and learning. Six (6) respondents that indicated 15.4% equally expressed readiness to align with the trendy innovations that enables personal learning at ease. However, six (6) respondent which implied 15.4% emphasized on the limitations of online innovations as it lacks reinforcement on the side of learners.

Research Question 2: Do language teachers and learners in your schools have interest in adopting and sustaining online innovations?

Table 2: Adoption and Sustenance of Online Innovations (ASOI)

Interest	Participants No.	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
High Interest	39	33	84.6%	84.6%
Low Interest	39	6	15.4%	100

Out of the thirty-nine (39) respondents, thirty-three (33) which indicated 84.6% teachers and learners expressed high level of interest in adopting and sustaining the online innovations because of the numerous benefits and advantages in language teaching and learning. On the other hand, six (6) which represented 15.4% showed low interest due to the cost of the online devices, network challenges and constant data usage.

Research Question 3: How does Online Innovations Enhance the Teaching and Learning Ability of Users?

Table 3: Online Innovations Enhancement Ability (OIEA)

Enhancing Ability	Participants' No.	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Richly Enhanced	39	37	94.9%	94.9%
Poorly Enhanced	39	2	5.1%	100

From the table above, it was evident that thirty-seven (37) which implied 94.9% of the respondents explicitly affirmed that online innovations have tremendously enhanced the ability of users in language teaching and learning. This affirmative response proved that online innovations have a better result-oriented teaching and learning.

Research Question 4: Does it Facilitate or Hinder Language Teaching and Learning?

Table 4: Facilitation or Hindrance to Language Teaching and Learning (FHLTL)

Facilitation/Hindrance	Participants' No	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative%
Facilitation	39	35	89.7%	89.7%
Hindrance	39	4	10.2%	100

The results from the participants' responses proved that thirty-five (35) which represented 89.7% respondents conformed to the facilitation of language teaching and learning through the use of online innovations. On the contrary, four (4) that accounted for 10.2% out of the thirty-nine participants' results revealed that online innovations do hinder language teaching and learning due to the unforeseen circumstances and cost implications.

Qualitative Analysis of Oral Interview

The findings from participants' responses of oral interview proved that technology is the trendy source of learning which transcends beyond the traditional method of language teaching and learning in a classroom setting. Language teachers and learners expressed great interest/ willingness in the adoption and usage of online innovations because of the various benefits and advantages. Again, respondents demonstrate readiness to explore more of the innovations by applying them in their various language teaching and learning.

On enhancement of the teaching and learning ability of users of online innovations, participants positively affirm to the benefits and advantages of the innovations in language teaching and learning. The innovations enhanced teachers and learners' ability on personal knowledge acquisition, skill development and improvement, professional growth, proficiency in it's application and all round experiences. Also, the online innovations such as; virtual conferences (VC), massive open online courses (MOOCs), language learning Apps (LLA), online language exchange platforms (OLEP), artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) engage educators and learners in effective collaboration and research for further development in language learning.

Pertaining the facilitation or hindrance of the innovations in language teaching and learning, respondents affirm strongly that the online innovations are fast facilitators in language teaching and learning. Language teaching and learning have been made easy, quick to access, grants personal knowledge, enhance learning experiences and all round facilitation of knowledge acquisition. The innovations make teachers and learners to travel less in the process of knowledge impartation and acquisition.

However, few respondents expressed minimal support and compliance to the online innovations due to some unpredictable circumstances such as lack of internet facilities, technical issues, network failure, lack of reinforcement, non assessment of extent of learning ability and so on. Resting on George Siemens (2005) connectivism theory, this study therefore

buttressed the principles and implications of online innovations as the revolution to the limitations of traditional learning approach.

Conclusion

This study concludes that online innovations abound in language teaching and learning with its prospects and challenges. Online innovations are supplementary tools and methods of language teaching and learning that covers the limitations of the traditional method of teaching and learning. The findings of this study shed more light on the prospects, challenges teachers and learners perception of the innovations. It also reveals the high interest of language teachers and learners in exploring and adopting online innovations to enhance learning experiences for more productive outcome.

Recommendations

The study recommends that educational institutions, curriculum planners, policy makers and stakeholders should encourage, prioritize and support these online innovations to enhance digital literacy and proficiency. Also, adequate provision of the internet facilities should be made for language teachers and learners to improve and master the approach. Again, having a better understanding of these prospects and challenges, language educators and learners can work together to create innovative, effective, engaging and quality result-oriented language learning experiences.

REFERENCES

- Andrade, M. S. (2017). Online English Language Learning Theory-Based Course Design and Pedagogy. *Journal of Education and Training Studies* Vol.5 No 3, Red Fame Publishing
[URL:http://jets.redfame.com](http://jets.redfame.com)
- Bax, S. (2003). Technology-Enhanced Language Learning. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Date, M. (2022). Digital Language Learning: Use of Mobile Apps for learning English Language: scope and limitations. *EIIRJ Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. March – April 2022 Vol. xi, special issues-II. Doi: 10, 1007/s10639-023-11864-9 Epub ahead of print.
- Guo, P. (2023). Teaching English Using Mobile Applications to Improve Academic Performanc and Language Proficiency of College Students. *Springer Nature Educ Inf Technol* (Dordr) 2023 May 20:1-5. <http://www.journalijar.com>
- Howard, G. (1983). Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.
- Levy, M. (1997). Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Content and Conceptualization. Oxford University.
- Olagundoye, F. (2014). An Investigation into ICT and Literacy Development in Secondary Schools in Nigeria. *A Journal of the Reading Association of Nigeria*.
- Siemens, G. (2005). Connenctivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age in *International of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*.
- Stephen, K. (1981). Second Language Acquisition.
- Warschauer, M. (1995). Language Learning Online: Theory and Practice in the CALL Classroom. *ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series*. Teacher's College Press Columbia University.