Language Education and the Future: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

The recent COVID 19 pandemic has exposed a great challenge in the world of learning and communication. According to UNESCO data, School closure in March 2020 affected about 80% of the student population in the world, as during the pandemic, the only tool to allow the continuation of education has been online teaching both in formal and informal education. The pandemic has no doubt accelerated deep transformations in teaching and learning. Online learning will not replace educational institutions as we have come to know them, but it is destined to increasingly shape the future of the education industry. The paper concludes that considering all the potential benefits of a fully developed virtual classroom, a positive vision of the future of language learning and teaching will be more authentic, decentralized, distributed, democratized and accessible to all.

Keywords*: Language Education and Communication*

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Background to the Study

Language can be described as the tool of significant expression since it provides individuals with the much-needed tools for the expression of their thoughts and the exploitation of their own environment. (Onah 2013). Thus, language which is commonly referred to as a medium of communication is a vehicle of people's culture, a mirror of their identity; it is the people's soul and power, which enables them to effectively participate in community activities, Bloroditsky (2001) affirms that language shapes the thoughts and emotions, determining one's perception of reality. Above all, language fosters peace, mutual understanding and the development of a democratic culture (Grin and Dalftary, 2003). No wonder then that the Federal Government of Nigeria emphasizes the need for the effective teaching and learning of language across the disciplines in Nigerian institutions of learning an encapsulated in the National Policy on Education (2004:5) thus:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a menas of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expected that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba.

Literature Review
Language Education in Africa

Obanya (1998) States That the Choice of Languages for Education in Africa has been based on a number of factors among which the historical experience of colonialism political evolution after the attainment of independence. the socio-linguistic contours of each country, and the strength of linguistic and educational lobbies in various countries. this paper looks at the colonial experience as key to understanding the topic under discussion.

Most African countries were colonized from about the middle of the 19th century to the 1960s. Each colonial master (power) imposed its own language on the African countries it colonized. Countries colonized by the French taught the French language at all levels, and from the first day in school; countries colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese had a practice very similar to that of the French; countries colonized by the British taught English to all levels, but always made sure that the first years of formal education were conducted in the first language of the learners or in the language of their immediate environment.

As a result of their colonial past African children are still educated predominantly through the medium of a foreign language. Since the foreign languages are major international languages, they help in the transfer of science and technology. But they are foreign and are therefore limited as media of education, in their capacity to serve many of the personal, local and national objectives of the educational system. This has hindered the potentials of the indigenous languages from being fully exploited. Being that education through the medium of mother tongue ensures that a child's educational development is rooted in his own cultural heritage. This notwithstanding, the foreign languages have become prerequisite for acquiring science and technology. Thus, western education, scholarships, business and science and

technology were rendered impossible without acquiring these languages. Besides, foreign languages are viewed as symbols of powers and means of securing good, secure jobs.

(Criper and Widdowson, 1975, Quoted in Tapps-Comax 1990-94, and Fafunwa (ed) 1970-78)

Language Education in Nigeria:

In Nigeria's philosophy of education, education is described as an instrument for National development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. FRN (1998) equally acknowledges that for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationships, individual and national unity as well as towards social cultural, economic political scientific and technological progress. The national educational goals which derive from the philosophy are therefore the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. From the foregoing, it is clear that the National Policy on Education appreciates the importance of language and education as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving our cultural values.

What will language Learning look like in the Future?

Traditionally, formal language lessons took place in a classroom with students at their desks and a teacher at the front. Almost all speaking and listening practices took place in this format, and students were given grammatical and vocabulary-based tasks to complete in their own time. This typical model has already changed or is being changed a great deal as more and more language schools/classrooms have embraced the virtual classroom and many have taken their teaching online. Educational softwares, particularly learning management system (LMS) have made managing these processes for easier.

The Internet

The internet has provided countless opportunities for learners and language users to access teaching online via websites, apps and learning softwares. However, there is still a great deal of benefits to be gained from working with a real teacher, whether through in-person contact or via a virtual classroom.

Many Language schools are already offering a blended learning model to their students. This means that learners get all the benefits of working with experience teachers, but they are also able to access resources, activities and assessments on demand from the cloud. This can be hugely effective and its highly likely that this teaching method will become the educational standard of the future.

The Language Class Can Hold Anytime Anywhere

We are moving ever closer to a twenty-four-hour society. More and more people will be able to access the language learning resources they need whenever they want no longer will students be happy with static courses that run at fixed time each week. Instead, they will want to be able to access the virtual classroom at a time that suits them. This implies that language schools will have to invest in (LMS) softwares to enable them to meet these requirements.

Learning Will be Done on Handled Devices

Learning has moved from the classroom, through teaching online and into handheld devices such as tablets and smartphones. Language learning apps have quickly become very popular. Thus, in the future we believe that students will no longer be satisfied with solely activity based mobile learning. Instead, they will want to access all the traditional benefits of learning from a teacher; but they wil want it from a virtual classroom on their mobile device.

Feed Back Will be Instant

The days of waiting for a week or more to receive grades and feedback on projects work are very likely to soon become a thing of the past. Learning management soft wares (LMS) is making the assessment process far more efficient. Presently most examining bodies like JAMB and even most colleges and universities have adopted computer-based exams where results are released to the candidates without delay unlike in the past when it takes a longer time before candidates could get their results. With this, language learners are now able to receive instant feedback on digital activities including revision, vocabulary practice, pronunciation techniques and assessments. When schools provide teaching online, this assessment automation is often one of the biggest benefits.

Virtual Campuses will be a Necessity

Digital learning spaces are becoming more and more ubequitos. They are beneficial for students who are learning at a distance and are unable to access in-person facilities. However, they are also very popular with students who don't have geographical constraints. The virtual classroom and the wider virtual campus give students the freedom to access learning resources from wherever they are. This could be the other side of the world, or it could just be from the comfort of their own homes a few streets away from the language school.

Learning will be More Flexible

One of the major benefits of the growth of the digital world is that it has given in for greater flexibility. This flexibility allows to have far more control over the space of their own learning. They are able to use a virtual classroom within a learning management soft ware (LMS) to access learning materials and facilities on demand. This means that they are able to work through materials as quick or as slowly as they choose. They can also gravitate towards the types of learning content they know works best for them, switching between revision activities and live teaching online whenever they want.

Advantages of the Virtual Classes to Language Schools
1.   **Increase Student volume while saving Costs**.

Virtual classes are exceedingly efficient and helpful for language schools as it allows schools to increase the volume of students they enroll each year while at the same time saving them costs. Hosting virtual classes for many students is easy with right virtual classroom software and that means language schools can offer courses to more students, without ever having to increase in physical structure. Students can sit through live or recorded virtual classes from the comfort of their own homes or offices and language schools can focus on delivering the best quality language training available. They also save in time and resources needed to attend face to face classes – no transportation costs e.t.c

2.   Virtual Classes increase profitability:

More students plus saved costs equal increased profitability. There is a huge economic drive for language schools to support virtual classes because it effortlessly increases their profit margins. They can broadcast a live class via one single virtual classroom to hundreds of students around the world and turn a profit from it. Provide a flexible learning environment.

3.   Provide a flexible learning environment:

Tailored to the new generation learners who are also attracted by technological development, allowing them the power to attend and actually learn from virtual classes. If a language school can provide a learning environment that is flexible, adaptable, easy to use and rich in interesting content, then students will not only achieve success, but they will tell everyone what they know about how great their language school is.

4.   Reduce Student Abandonment

As earlier stated, virtual classes create a highly flexible and adaptable learning environment for administrators, teachers and students. As a result, students feel happier with their training and there is a decrease in the number of students that abandon the course before completing it. They are also more likely to recommend courses to friends and family members they know would also benefit from this system of learning.

5.   Virtual Classrooms integrated with web access:

Offering a consistent learning environment is almost as important as offering a flexible one. Students become unmotivated when e learning courses become complicated with too many username and passwords or login websites. That is why it is important for language schools to have virtual classes that are built into the same LMS platform where they access their courses to virtual classrooms with the click of a button under one single website. Administrator can manage virtual classes, student enrollment, hire classes recordings, student evaluation and more, all from one single sign only that simplifies their administrative tasks.

6.   Virtual classes provide access to native speaking teachers in other geographical areas:

Some language schools are in geographical areas that make it difficult to hire native language teachers for their school. Virtual classes can help them provide native language instruction to their students that they would otherwise not have access to. This makes the students feel more confident in their language instruction and are likely to develop strong language skills as a result.

Conclusion

To conclude, the answer to the question "what will the language education of the future look like?" We can confidently say, online and virtual learning numbers will continue to grow rapidly. There are some exiting developments in the virtual space involving language education and it will be fascinating to watch how that develops in the near future. The way language learners expect to digest education content will also continue to drive change, and platforms such as Futurelearn are an excellent way for educators to deliver flexible options. Finally,

considering all the potential benefits of a fully developed virtual classroom, a positive vision of the future of language learning and teaching will be more authentic, decentralized, distributed, democratized and accessible to all.

Recommendations
Because e learning is inevitable in the current dispersion every language school should aim at providing their staff, students and teachers with the best available environment possible. We think the best way to plan for the future of education is to embrace the most advanced and up to date technology now. Language schools who aren't already offering virtual classrooms to their students may want to look into the software options that are available to them.

The future language learning has a great deal to get exited about. The virtual classroom, provided by a learning management system (LMS) is going to play a huge role. Students will be able to get access all the resources they need from one virtual environment. As educational platforms are cloud based students will be able to get the access without having to download or purchase any software of their own.

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