



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning in English: The Case of Staff and Faculty of Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey, Calavi- Benin

Michael Owusu Tabiri

Lecturer, Faculty of Informatics, Ghana Technology University College, Ghana

Abstract:

The reality is that the mode of teaching and learning of languages has been the traditional method of face to face delivery in Ghana, in particular and Africa in general. This study investigated how ICT could be placed at the centre of teaching/learning of English Language.

Through the use of computers, video and telecommunications, Faculty and Staff in a Francophone country pursued English Proficiency Programme via Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning for five months at the Ghana Technology University College. The study sought to bridge the gap of language barrier that existed between Francophone and Anglophone countries. The paper argued that to ensure all round accelerated development and growth of Africa, the ultimate panacea should be the promotion and patronage of African Bilingualism or Franglais-Bilingualism (Proficiency in African languages or proficiency in English and French simultaneously) via Teleconferencing or Videoconferencing Teaching and Learning.

Keywords: *Teleconferencing Teaching, Language Learning, Franglais Bilingualism, African Bilingualism, Technology in Didactics, English Proficiency, Accelerated Development.*

1. Introduction

According to O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011), the study of linguistics is centuries old while computational linguistics has only been studied for some decades. This emphasizes the importance of computational linguistics (CL) in our educational system.

The reality is that the mode of teaching and learning of languages has been the traditional method of face to face delivery in Ghana, in particular and Africa in general. This study sought to investigate how ICT could be placed at the centre of teaching/learning of languages by helping Francophone learners to acquire all the four language skills in English.

Learning a second language or a foreign language is a dynamic process and the previous knowledge system. Language already developed can therefore, serve as a tool in learning new language features (Amuzu, 2003). In other words, didactically and pedagogically, learners learn from known to unknown. It is always expedient for teachers to bear this assertion religiously in mind. This will ensure effective teaching and learning of English or French. As learning a second or foreign language is a dynamic process, it is equally significant to incorporate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching/learning of languages in Ghana, and in Africa as a whole.

The context of this study is computer-assisted language learning (CALL) or computer-assisted instruction (CAI) that can popularly be termed as technology-enhanced language learning (TELL). In short, the study sought to investigate how technology, particularly Teleconferencing Teaching/learning in English could be judiciously used to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of language teaching and learning. Thus, it was found that using Video/Teleconferencing teaching and learning of language could seek to answer a major contemporary question of Applied Linguistics (Flinders, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

As a lecturer of French and English, at the Ghana Technology University College, I have come to realize that students spend more time with computers than reading their lecture notes. This has become a real problem where students take delight in whatsapping and browsing to the detriment of their academic work, and it is against this background that I found it expedient to carry out this research to find out how ICT could be used to contribute to the effectiveness of language teaching/learning in our universities. It is clear from the available evidence that people understand technology more than they do understand one another. People everywhere use ICT but using ICT without understanding one another will not bring any sustainable development. Unless man seeks to have one language, real development cannot occur and we cannot have one language without the use of technology. The key to all round African accelerated development is technology in didactics. If all Ghanaians could speak one common language, and all Africans could speak

one common language then total development of Africa would be inevitable. An ICT would therefore, become an agent of transformation in Africa thereby linking people everywhere within the shortest possible time. Among the problems caused by lack of understanding of a second/third language and the application of technology to teaching/learning include:

- The difficulty of learners travelling and living in either Anglophone or Francophone countries to study a third language (L3)
- The inability of learners to speak and read French or English
- The poor reading and writing skills of learners in English and French leading to poor performance in other courses
- The language barrier in Africa that hinders a sustainable and meaningful economic growth and development.

These problems were addressed in the study.

3. Objectives of the Study

To investigate how ICT, particularly Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing could be used in teaching/learning of English in African Universities.

3.1. Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective, the following specific objectives were pursued:

- To explore how Francophone Faculty and Staff of Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey-Calavi, in Benin could use Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing to learn English in Ghana.
- To investigate how Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing could assist learners to acquire all the four language skills
- To ascertain how Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing could enhance fluency and proficiency in English language.

4. Research Questions

The objectives of the study were addressed by answering the following questions:

1. What is Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing Teaching/learning?
2. What problem does Teleconferencing Teaching seek to address?
3. How could students use Teleconferencing Teaching to learn English?
4. How could Teleconferencing assist learners to acquire all the four language skills?
5. How could Teleconferencing enhance fluency and proficiency in English in African countries as a whole?

5. Literature Review

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) can be classified into three phases: behaviourists CALL/Structural CALL (1960-1970), which stressed learners' responses to grammatical and vocabulary exercises, Communicative CALL (1970-1980) and Integrative CALL approach started in the 1990s emphasizes the learning/teaching in an authentic social context (Derakhshan,Salehi,Rahimzadeh,2015). Teleconferencing simply means conducting a conference by using computers, video, and telecommunication to share sound and images with others at remote sites (Sabin,1996).While Carla Lane and P.S. Portway (1994) explain Teleconferencing as,

“meeting through a telecommunication medium. It is a generic term for linking people between two or more locations by electronics. There are at least six types of teleconferencing: audio, audio-graphic, computer, video, business television (BTV), and distance education.” (www.studymode.com)

Teleconferencing can be represented as follows:

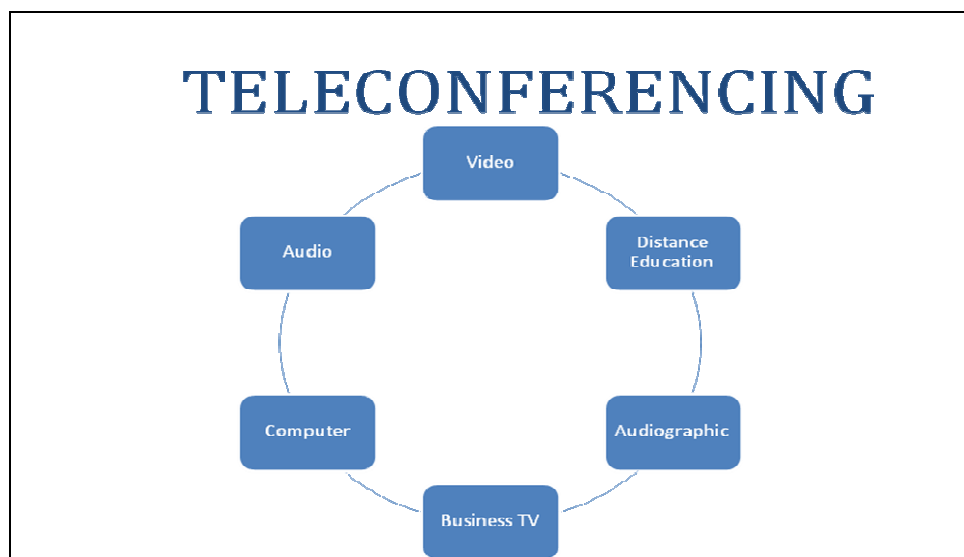


Figure 1

Through the above means, the Faculty and Staff of Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey, Calavi in Benin were able to learn English Language for five months successfully.

De Souza (2013) recommends the integration of internet in teaching/learning of French language in Ghanaian public Universities. The emergence of technological educational platforms such as web 2.0 has brought education to the door stairs of numerous people in the world (Becta, 2009). Web 2.0 is defined by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) as, "a catch-all term to describe a variety of developments on the web and a perceived shift in the way the web is used (Becta, 2009). This has been characterized as the evolution of web use from passive consumption of content to more active production, participation, and sharing" (Becta, 2009).

Additionally, according to (Adams, 2010), web 2.0 technology focuses on the usefulness of RSS feeds, Twitter, Skype, Google Docs, and blogs. The importance of web 2.0 technology cannot be over emphasized in teaching/learning of English in Africa if only all Francophone learners desire to be proficient simultaneously in French and English. In other words, Ghana Technology University College, Language Centre carried out a-5 month Teleconferencing Teaching in English Language to ascertain that an African University could move to the second stage of development of ICT which is usually characterized by the change from static and stagnant web pages to dynamic, interactive and integrative communicative teaching learning approach.

According to Seminega et al (2011),

"the emergence of Information Technology, the technological solutions like developments in information, communication and computing technologies have made available powerful tools like video conferencing, Satellite Applications to a large sector of the population in the world. Particularly in developed countries, the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) started changing the lifestyles of modern population"

It is for this reason that it is believed that without Africa getting fully involved in Information and Communication Technology in education, specifically in teaching and learning of languages, the all round accelerated development in Africa will be a monumental fiasco or mirage. According to Madhavi (2010), communicative method for learning languages, combines extensively, high-quality content with flexible and interactive multimedia technology. In other words, the emergence of Technology in Didactics (TD) encourages more active participation of learners thereby minimizing teacher centeredness in teaching and learning. (Reinders and White, 2010)

6. Methodology

Before embarking on the Videoconferencing Teaching/learning in English, the researcher conducted a Diagnostic Test to enable him to assess the level of learners' competence/difficulties (didactically and pedagogically), as learners learn from known to unknown). The following English courses were taught as well as learners writing Final Examinations all via Teleconferencing.

Course Title	Course Code
• Listening and Speaking (Oral Expression)	GTUC ENG 187
• Correct Usage	GTUC ENG 189
• Reading and Comprehension	GTUC ENG 190
• Introduction to Grammar	GTUC ENG 191
• Writing and Composition	GTUC ENG 192

The learners were taken through the aforementioned courses so as to enable them to acquire all the four language skills in English language.

Purposive sampling strategy was used to select the study site and participants. This was to ensure that only lecturers or participants who could easily be taught and grasped the skills in Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning were selected. It was believed that after taking learners through English lessons via Teleconferencing Teaching, they would be able to communicate, function efficiently as well as improving teaching and learning in their country.

The study site involved a Beninois' tertiary institution called Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey-Calavi (EPAC). The study population or sample for the study comprised Faculty and Staff members from Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey, Calavi in Benin.

- Staff And Faculty Of Epac Who Took Part In Teleconferencing Teaching In English At Ghana Technology University College- Tesano Campus, Accra

Learners	Male	Female	Total
Staff And Faculty Of Epac	8	4	12

Table 1

7. Results

At the end of the Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning, learners were assessed by writing Final Examinations in five main courses, namely, Listening and Speaking (Oral Expression), Correct Usage, Reading and Comprehension, Introduction to Grammar and Writing and Composition.

As the main objective of the Teleconferencing was to encourage Communicative Teaching/Learning approach in African universities, the researcher decided to give the general summary of learners' performance without analyzing the errors committed by them. The results of the Final Examinations are as follows:

RANGE OF MARKS OVER 100	NUMBER OF LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE
50- 60	0	0
65 – 70	5	41.7
71 – 75	3	25.0
76- 80	4	33.3
81- 85	0	0
86- 90	0	0
91 -95	0	0
96 – 100	0	0

Table 2: Course Title: Listening and Speaking (Oral Expression) (GTUC ENG 187) (Range of Marks Over 100)

RANGE OF MARKS OVER 70	NUMBER OF LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE
0 – 25	0	0
26 – 30	1	5.8
31 – 40	2	11.7
41 - 50	7	40.8
51- 60	2	11.7
61- 70	0	0

Table 3: Course Title: Correct Usage (GTUC ENG 189)

RANGE OF MARKS OVER 70	NUMBER OF LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE
0 – 25	1	5.8
26 – 30	0	0
31 – 40	2	11.7
41- 50	0	0
51- 60	4	23.3
61- 70	5	29.2

Table 4: Course Title: Reading and Comprehension (GTUC ENG 190)

RANGE OF MARKS OVER 70	NUMBER OF LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE
0 – 25	0	0
26 – 30	0	0
31 – 40	3	17.5
41- 50	2	11.7
51- 60	6	35.0
61- 70	1	5.8

Table 5: Course Title: Introduction to Grammar (GTUC ENG 191)

RANGE OF MARKS OVER 70	NUMBER OF LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE
0 – 25	5	29.1
26 – 30	2	11.7
31 – 40	3	17.5
41- 50	2	11.7
51- 60	0	0
61- 70	0	0

Table 6: Course Title: Writing and Composition (GTUC ENG 192)

From the foregoing analysis, one can say that even though learners who took part in the Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning have shown some areas of learning difficulties, particularly in Writing and Composition, they have equally shown mastery of English language as beginners especially in listening and speaking English. It is believed that as a language is meant to be spoken by applying it in a specific linguistics environment, learners must be encouraged didactically to acquire listening, speaking, reading and writing skills concurrently and chronologically.

8. Discussions

How could Africa realize real socioeconomic development as well as all round transformation without free flow of communication? Unless man seeks to have one language, real development cannot occur and we cannot have one language without the use of

technology. The key to all round African accelerated development is technology in didactics. If all Ghanaians could speak one common language, and all Africans could speak one common language then total development of Africa would be inevitable. An ICT would therefore become an agent of transformation in Africa thereby linking people everywhere within the shortest possible time. Starting Faculty and Staff English or French Proficiency Programme in Africa via Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing Teaching and Learning would be a step in the right direction that could ensure swift acquisition of language skills as well as socio-economic growth and development of African continent. We could agree with (Darkwa, 2011) that,

“...the future of the African continent depends upon the willingness of African leaders to harness the new information and communication technologies in education, to advance the development of the global economy.

A nation unable to join this new economic order is effectively locked out of the new global economy, and forced to remain a marginal player on the world economic stage.”

9. Implication to Research and Practice

The study aimed at proposing technology in teaching/learning of French and English languages in Africa that will enable all Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to become bilingual (French and English) so as to enhance swift and sustainable development in Africa. Without bridging the language barrier there will not be unity among African countries, simply because once one cannot understand each other's language, alienation and suspicion will be inevitable. Even in Europe, Gallardo (2014) states that the development of commercial relations gave rise to the demand for modern language learning in European Universities in the XIX century. That is to say, Africans cannot engage in meaningful commercial relations without the study of modern language learning in African Universities.

The study targeted all teachers/lecturers particularly teachers of languages to become proficient concurrently in French and English so that they could intend teach learners in first, second and tertiary institutions to acquire all the four language skills without necessarily travelling to neighboring countries to study English. No proper development can take place without the use of technology in teaching/learning languages. Education without technology in didactics is illiteracy and it is for this reason that we found it expedient to undertake all this important study at the Ghana Technology University College.

10. Conclusion

This research work sought to answer a major contemporary question of Applied Linguistics. That is, how Information and Communication Technology (ICT particularly, Teleconferencing could be used to contribute to the effectiveness of language teaching/learning in Africa, in general, and in Ghanaian universities, in particular through explorative and investigative research.

11. Future Research

The researcher could discuss and analyze specific errors committed by learners in all the aspects in English language that they were taken through during Teleconferencing Teaching and Learning. Also, as the programme took the form of exchange, the researcher could carry out research in French-The Case of Staff and Faculty of Ghana Technology University College, learning French as L3 via Teleconferencing/Videoconferencing so as to ensure balanced data for linguistics analysis and for swift simultaneous accelerated of French and English in Francophone and Anglophone countries in Africa.

12. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Dr.Nana Osei Darkwa III, the President of Ghana Technology University College who foresaw the importance of Videoconferencing/Teleconferencing Teaching/learning in English and French in Africa and assigning me to coordinate and teach Francophone Faculty and Staff of Ecole Polytechnique d'Abomey-Calavi in Benin. I am also grateful to Professor Felicien Avlessi, the Director of EPAC as well as Mr. Bienvenu Olory, the Coordinator of the exchange programme at the EPAC- Benin.

Last but not least, I wish to thank Dr. Ezer Yeboah-Boateng, the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Informatics and Dr. Stephen Asunka, the Head, Centre for Online Learning and Teaching (Ghana Technology University College), for their encouragement and love for research, as well as Mrs. Agnes Quarshie, the current Coordinator of Language Centre at the Ghana Technology University College. May the Almighty God bless you all and grant you serendipitous surprises in the name of Jesus Christ.

13. References

- i. Amuzu, D.S.Y. (2003): “A role for mother tongue in building competency skills by learners of French”, University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana
- ii. Becta. <http://www.becta.org.uk/>, 2002 Becta (2009): Emerging Technologies for Learning. <http://emergingtechnologies.becta.org.uk>
- iii. Darkwa, O. (2011): “Africa's future depends on ICT”, www.thechronicle.com.gh
- iv. Derakhshan, A., Salehi,D., Rahimzadeh,M.,(2015): Computed Assisted Language Learning : Pedagogical pros and cons, International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies, AESS Publication, 111-120
- v. De-Souza, A.Y.M., (2013): Stratégies de compréhension écrite sur l'Internet : quelles approches pédagogiques adopter pour développer l'autonomie des étudiants en FLE dans les universités du Ghana ? A Ph.D (Linguistics) Thesis, Université de Strasbourg; University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

- vi. Flinders University,(2015), Applied Linguistics Handbook, Department of Applied Linguistics, <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/language-studies/applied-linguistics.cfm>
- vii. Lane, C., Portway, P.S., (1994): Guide to Teleconferencing and Distance Learning, Applied Business.
- viii. Madhavi,I.,(2010): Use of Language Laboratory in English language Learning and Teaching. Viskhapatnam: Institute of Management GITAM University.
- ix. O'Grady,W.A., Dobrovolsky, M., & Katamba, F.,(eds.) 1997: Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction. London: Longman.
- x. Randall, D. (2006): The impact of technology on Language Teaching, USA: English Language Institute, University of Utah. <http://www.iteslj.org>
- xi. Reinders, H. and C. White, (2010), "The theory and practice of technology in materials development and task design",In J. Rechards & N. Harwood (Eds).English language teaching materials. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp: 58-80.
- xii. Sabin,W.A. (1999): The Gregg Reference Manual 8th edition, McGraw-Hill, New York
- xiii. Seminnega, C.E., Nginye, M.G. (2011): Online Teaching of Languages: A case study of Moi University, Kenya,Journal of Language,Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa Vol.3 No.1