# Digital Literacy and The English Language Teacher in the 21st Century

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**Abstract**
*Various experiences teach us daily that change is inevitable. The covid-19 pandemic that put the whole world into a closet for months and the need to look for new ways of surviving; one time ENDSARS protest in Nigeria, the on-going Ukraine war, and many other situations are lessons that taught us we cannot remain the same. These situations have revealed our need for digital literacy as educators, more than ever before. This is because every sector of the world economy is being much affected but largely, the education sector, and, especially in Nigeria due to the negative attitude of our leaders to education. This paper looked into digital literacy and the English language teacher in the 21st century. The paper reviewed relevant literature on importance of teaching and learning English language; the teacher as a factor in the teaching and learning of English language in the 21st century; need for digital literacy for English language teachers; challenges of M-Learning and strategies for encouraging teachers towards digital literacy. It was concluded that digital skills are important for English language teachers in the 21st century based on current practices in the application of ICT in language education as it will enhance both teachers and students' activities and consequently, students' performance. It was recommended that teachers should be up to date in acquiring digital literacy in order to be able to orientate students on the proper use of digital skills in language learning and that government should equip the public schools with ICT facilities as well as ICT tools and equipment for both teachers and students in order to create virtual learning and teaching environments that will be conducive. This is the responsibility of a responsible government.*

## Introduction

Digital skills are important for teachers in all nations of the world and, especially, English language teachers in the 21st century, based on current practices in the application of information and communication technology (ICT) in language instruction. Any nation that does not value education will remain at the backdoor of development. This is because education is a vital part of development of an individual's life and as Adegbenjo (2014) opined, it opens door to excellent career opportunities as it consists of systematic instruction, teaching and training by teachers. Okemakinde (2014) affirmed that education is the bedrock of every society and tool for nation building but observed, however, that in recent times, the need to focus on quality education is necessary due to the neglect and mass production of educated people without regards to set standard, procedure and process in education. It was noted that quality education can only be achieved when we put into place principal factors such as the teacher, the learning environment and the student.

Literacy, is the bedrock of education. A person that is not literate cannot be said to be educated, hence literacy opens the door for development and is also a necessity for any societal or individual development, either economically, socially, scientifically or technologically. Literacy will help acquire the knowledge of technology which will help to develop in the digital arena in every field of endeavour. In the field of education, Jegede,

Olatunbosun, Ajayi & Olugbuyi (2017) see digital teaching as a way of using ICT to disseminate instruction to learners as teaching can be expressed with digital technology through text messaging and emails, audio conference call, video conference call, social media, computing, among others.

The 21st century is characterized by the upsurge of new technologies, literacy and literacy practices in an unprecedented way and in every field of endeavour, including education. Hence,  Akinwamide (2013) noted that the definition of literacy, made up of books and many other print media may not aptly describe the 21st century literacy which encompasses new ways of locating information across multiple modalities, participating in teleconferences, interacting through emails, virtual environments or creating a personal website, power points, twitters, blog or wiki but now exposes readers to facts beyond the confinement of the printed word as they are expected to make sense of a complex design that includes a myriad of images, pop-ups, hyperlinked texts and icons beyond the print world.  The need therefore arises for the inclusion of digital literacy into teaching and learning.

The teacher is a very important factor in any educational delivery system.  Scholars have pointed out important factors relating to the teacher.  Ojo and Illo (2018) opined that the teacher is significant in the development of the learners' intellects by inculcating into them the right attitudes, knowledge, values and skills and that success or failure of any teaching endeavor is hinged on teachers' communication abilities which results into meaningful teaching and learning,  hence the need for the teacher to present the content of his thought in a clear and suitable language for effective reception by the students.  Abdu-Raheem (2017) averred that teachers are indispensable in the successful implementation of educational programmes all over the world as they are regarded as builders of the nations because they are in charge of planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and implementing educational programmes. They are the architects of standard and qualitative education in any country and teacher education is the way forward towards the production of trained committed, efficient and effective teachers who can wage war against half-baked graduates and thus, promote academic excellence in the country. Fasae and Ogunleye (2021) investigated the professional updates of English language educators in Nigeria and their preparedness for globalization and found that English language educators are the instruments to achieve effective delivery of English language teaching to make Nigerians good speakers of English language in order to meet with world standard.

Many nations of the world take education serious because it is the potent tool of development but reverse is the case in Nigeria.  The present situation in Nigeria reveals that education has been relegated to the background and the government is very insensitive about education.  Orawaru and Okungbowa (2014) lamented that the Nigerian educational system is crying for effective implementation of its curriculum, which could only be achieved if teachers are properly trained to prepare to teach appropriately the content of the curriculum.  They noted that good teaching is the heart of good schooling, yet, many enter the profession unprepared, others received poor quality training and many never received training at all.  It was emphasized that quality teacher preparation is hinged on the ability of the training institutions to develop and maintain quality of education in consonance with the changing realities of time as it gives confidence to its teaming graduates.

Furthermore, Etim (2018) confirmed that poor quality education has impoverished most societies which has led to a high rate of illiterate men and women who cannot contribute meaningfully to building the society which makes it very urgent to restructure the teacher education through proper innovations to aid revamp the educational sector and the society at large.  He noted the need for innovation in the teachers' teaching methods to suit the global society, the schools' curricula, the educational policies, the management practices and other areas which will breed sustainable change into the teacher education programme.

## Importance of Teaching and Learning English Language

English language, an official language in Nigeria, is indispensable in every communicative situation in Nigeria, and especially very important in the choice of career, which is the reason it is compulsory and a pre-requisite for entering into the university.  Muhammad, Ya'u, Aliyu and Hassan (2018) see English as one language that has travelled round the world and now has almost as many speakers as its native speakers which is an unparalleled feat in the history of world languages because of it's increasing growth in strengths, pushing other world languages backward in the global space, and opening new frontiers.

The need for effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools is quite inestimable as reiterated by Adakonye and Ogbonyomi (2012) and that if the language of instruction is not right or what is taught does not correspond with what was perceived so, works are not done properly in schools because English language is the main medium of instruction through which other subjects are taught from primary schools to all levels of tertiary institutions.  It was affirmed, therefore, that the teacher, is at the center of the delivery of quality education in any nation which makes it imperative to look at the teacher of English as a factor in the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools

While noting the incalculable importance of communication (English) to man, especially when daily human interaction is considered, Muhammad, et al. (2018), citing Danladi (2013), noted that in political and social policy, English language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication, although it has always possessed an added cultural importance as a tool of the dominant ideology.  Also, citing Owolabi and Nnaji (2013), language is a powerful tool of control used by the colonial powers and that, English is an irresistible language as far as development is concerned because "for any nation particularly in the 3rd world to be relevant and derive the maximum benefit from the opportunities that abound in every area of human need for personal advancement and national development, English is a sine qua non".  This is why English continues to hold sway as the language of development in most developing nations of the world, and even in some developed nations of Asia, where it is learnt and used as a foreign language.  Olusoji (2012) averred that English language contributes immensely to the rapid growth and development experienced in Nigeria.  Salahuddin, et al., (2012) also affirmed that, English is the dominant language of international business and economic development, and that dominance continues to grow with the continued globalization of business through mergers and international investment.

However, Danladi (2013) noted that in spite of all perceived roles of English language to humankind, an all-embracing interpretation of it continues to elude us due to the complexity of its structure and the functions it performs.  Also, in view of the importance of the English language in the Nigerian context, Ojo &

Illo, 2018) reiterated that over the years, the performance of secondary school students in Nigeria has been adjudged to be abysmally low.

English language, being an official language in Nigeria, and being accorded utmost importance, should be taught and learned with all the seriousness it deserved.  Muhammad, et al. (2018)  believe that English is not a subject which can only be taught but that which must be learnt but noted that its teaching and learning is far from being satisfactory and unconducive in the country which is affecting students' performance.

Several scholars attributed the poor performance in the subject to different causes.

**The Teacher as a Factor in the Teaching and Learning of English Language in the 21st Century**

The 21st century teacher is receiving a call to digital literacy more than ever before.  Akinwamide (2013) observed that in the 21st century, transformations are happening to the look and feel of learning environments, the role of teachers, the pedagogic disposition of teachers, the inclination of learners to learning as well as learning styles and what and how they learn.  Also**,** Apata (2021) averred that the world and its inhabitants are in constant flux of change which should push every progressive educator to change their pedagogies for improved teaching and learning.

Soarez dos Luz (2015) agreed that good teaching involves good communication between the teacher and students and also among students because the best productivity in a classroom comes from effective co-operation between the teacher and the students.  Adebile (2009) noted that effective  and  functional  curriculum implementation involves professionally trained teachers because they constitute the  vital  force  as part of the implementers of the curriculum at every stage of the educational programme and their quality  determines the  quality  of  their output, hence, no educational system can be consolidated without the development of the teachers that will implement the programme.

In the present dispensation, classroom teachers, and, especially language educators should maximize the opportunity to explore the web for the translation and transformation of language curriculum and educational policies. Jarque, Cwele, Ekholm, Martin,  Varkey,  Granryd and Mlambo (2017) in Had and Rashid (2014) noted that the development of digital world is generating vast new opportunities for exchange and  cooperation in  many  industries but that keeping  up  with  the  new  technology  to accommodate the learning needs among the new generation of digital natives (net generation) is crucial among teachers.  Oyinloye and Fasae (2019) explored the need to engender teachers' and students' interest towards utilizing ICT for effective teaching and learning of English language and found a significant relationship between the interest of teachers to acquire ICT skills and use it for effective teaching during classroom interaction and students' interest to learn through ICT during classroom interaction.  This means that if teachers' interest and motivation in acquiring ICT skills through the provision of enabling environment  will enhance its utilization for effective teaching.  Tuminez  (2017), in Rashid and Rahman  (2014)  averred that education sector needs to accommodate the needs of the younger generations who were born in an era which is different from the era of the teachers, where students are exposed to advanced information technology without  borders  at  their  fingertips: they  have  smartphones  and  mobile data,  which allow them to have access to countless authentic materials on the internet.

Paul, Kerkhoff and Spires (2017) in Apata (2021) observed that digital literacy has not only changed the educational standards, but also the content (curriculum)  which further stretched the role of teachers in the classrooms, in addition to improving the existing knowledge and skills.  Gaballo (2019) established that digital learning is reshaping education in unprecedented ways and that as far as language learning is concerned, the burden of innovation has mostly relieson the good will of determined teachers who have  decided, in  perfect isolation,  to  take  advantage  of  the  new  technologies  made available.  He noted that recent developments in the  field of computer-assisted language learning proved  the  positive  effects  of  technology  used  in promoting  learning.

However, Conole and Oliver [2007] noted that quite the opposite is the case with teachers: "teaching  with" technology  generally  implies  an  instrumental  approach  to  the  use  of  technology  in language classes, while "teaching from" technology reflects the  interactive, immersive experience of teaching from within a learning environment (Gaballo, 2017).  Whether  using  online,  blended,  or  class-based  learning,  teachers  are  faced with  the  challenge  of combining  a  more  informal  learner-centered  approach  –  giving  learners  control over  their  learning process  – with the prevalent practices of teacher-centered modes –based on set goals and standard forms of assessment. In order to balance learner autonomy, personal choice and the affordances of LMS tools, teachers  (as  all  the  stakeholders  in  the  learning  process)  need to  master  what Gaballo (2014) termed the  complex triangulation of the pedagogical, methodological and technological levels.  For  technology to  be  fully  integrated  in  the  teaching  and learning system, it needs to be the mediating instrument for cognitive simulation, skills development, ad-hoc  learning  and  knowledge  construction/co-construction, i.e. it should  take  full  account  of  the  pedagogical  and  methodological  instances,  and  translate  and  incorporate them  into  the learning environment so as to achieve a seamless whole. In order to do that, drivers and enablers should be used that can trigger or facilitate a process of change intended to introduce a positive outcome in the system  –  in  this  case,  technology  integration  in  language  classes.  When teacher education programmes are given priorities and innovations put in place, literacy will be attainable, giving rise to skilled and efficient teachers who will integrate various strategies to make teaching and learning worthwhile (Etim (2018).

**Need for Digital Literacy for English Language Teachers**
The 21st century literate person is expected to, not only have alphabetic literacy, but to also keep abreast with the other forms of literacy in order to function fully in any environment because literacy is indeed fundamental to human life and affects all aspects of human endeavor; and indeed also transforms the lives of people. Etim (2018) averred that literacy is a building block for any societal development as a society filled with literate people will   impact positively on the political,   economical and social development of that society by transforming the lives of the people because educated people are able to communicate with others through exchange of ideas and feelings and proffer solution to ailing problems. Etim noted that imparting positive literacy skills on the students will add positive values to the students' mental view of their society which will enable them to transform their society through exchange of ideas and good policies.  Also, one's self esteem will be built and people will think critically.

Digital  technologies  have  revolutionized  the  mode  of  information  selection,  acquisition,  processing, organization, storage, retrieval, management, dissemination and use.  Some of the digital literacy tools include

internet, mobile devices webite or blog, computers, social edia, web 20.14, websites, service plan booster, media, etc. (Sambe, Ioryem and Nongomin (2018). Digital learning allows students to study at the comfort of their homes. As long as students have the necessary digital devices, access to internet, affordable internet costs and adequate supply of electricity, they can be able to obtain front seats in the virtual classroom. For instance, Mostafa, Elsherif and Shaalan (2015) highlighted some studies which describe teaching and learning through the mobile technologies as a very good way of making the students active participants in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge by taking the outlook of the teachers and students attitude and perceptions in its implementation.

Ogunduyile (2015) applied the mobile learning to English language study and found that Mobile learning (M-learning) is cooperative, collaborative and learner centred. It enhances active involvement of the students in the acquisition of linguistic knowledge as it gives the learners the chance through networks and different forums to gather, post and share ideas and other resources. The opportunity given by M -learning afforded the learners of the chance of using authentic English language that made it possible for them to construct their own knowledge. The integration of M-learning in to the teaching of English in secondary schools would afford the learners the opportunity of having a method that is 21st century compliant and availing the learners the digital age benefits. To fully enjoy the benefits offered by this innovation, the schools must be given some infrastructural face lifts in terms of good network connection and stable electricity.

Fasae and Egunjobi (2020) investigated teachers and students' perception of the contributions of mobile learning to the teaching and learning of Business Studies in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria and found that Mobile-learning increases collaboration learning and interaction, offers flexibility and equity, helps in achieving educational objectives and goals, among others.

The need for digital learning also calls for a virtual learning environment (VLE) which, according to Nwabude, Ogwueleka and Irhebhude (2020) has the capability to increase learners' tendency to learn, multitask and develop social autonomy through added tools and flexible learning environment. It also, provides learner the extended programme beyond the four walls of the classroom anywhere, anytime as long as learner has log-in access to virtual classroom through the Institution's portal. It was noted however, that VLE cannot work on its own except there is a working internet connected to a computer system and both teachers and students possess the e-skills and knowledge to access, use and interact with it.

**Challenges of M-Learning**

Mostafa, et al (2015) in Fasae and Egunjobi (2021) averred that mobile learning (M-learning) makes it possible for students to learn, collaborate, and share ideas among each other with the aid of internet and technology development but that acceptance by learners and educators is critical to the employments of M-learning systems. They emphasized that attitudes towards M-learning technology is an important factor that helps in determining whether or not learners and educators are ready to use M-learning. Such attitudes will serve to identify strengths and weaknesses and facilitate the development of the technology infrastructure. Mostafa, Elsherif, and Shaalan (2015) investigated the attitudes towards the use of mobile learning in higher education and found significant differences among the students' attitudes towards M-learning with regard to their smartphone ownership,

country and age. Furthermore, results indicated that M-learning can be one of the promising pedagogical technologies to be employed in the higher educational environments within the Arab Gulf countries.

In Nigeria, during the lock down, all schools were closed down and only a few private schools could conduct online teaching and learning; even among them, a few could sustain this with their teachers using their phones. The possibility was not in public schools at all.  Even among tertiary institution students, majority of them were not ready.  This was on the bases that  some students didn't have good phones, cost of data, electricity and even unequal access to good phones among students was prevalent.  Hence, students in public schools had no access to digital learning during the lock down.

Mulenga and Marbán (2020) noted that several researches  have been conducted on  the  knowledge required  for the adoption  of digital technology  during the  COVID-19  crisis such as Agnoletto and  Queiroz (2020) who posited that  the  logic of  going  "digital" is not  simple but  there is  an ongoing  outcry  to  launch tools of emergency measures, mostly, "adopting" the use of digital-technologies for learning; Roy (2020) in Australia suggested that teachers need to download some teleconferencing facilities (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Lifesize…) that may be used to deliver lessons remotely; Baytiyeh (2019), argued that maintaining learning and communication during a school closure by any means possible  is  important; and Burke  (2020), strongly  posited  that  in  an effort  to  reshape education, certain  measures needed  to  be  implemented  during  the  COVID-19  school closure period such as maintaining communication with students, parents, teachers and other staff members through e-mails and phone calls, maintaining  access  to  learning materials like Google Apps (e.g. Google drive, dropbox, cloud…) for education, Moodle Cloud, Edmodo, or social media tools (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Yahoo…) and maintaining  access  to data via cloud computing for servers and back up in a location other than the school (Burke, 2020).

The  role of  the  teacher in  the  digital or  smart classrooms  is  very  challenging as noted by Thirumalai (2011).  He highlighted that the teacher must  be  effectively trained  to  use  the  technology  for  lesson planning  and  student instruction, and help students to explore the expansive world of English. It was further stressed that the use of technology bridges the gap between the teaching styles and the learning styles because the traditional and conventional style of lecture method which caters only to a homogenous group of learners is replaced by digital classrooms  which  cater  to  the  visual  learners,  auditory  learners  and  kinaesthetic learners. Also, audiovisuals, video conferencing, short animations, etc. can be  used  in  teaching  learning process. Teachers can use PowerPoint presentations to illustrate the chapters or topics of the respective subjects.

Etim (2018) opined that technology literacy involves a person having full grasp of modern technologies, like the social media and the internet, and using this source of knowledge to disseminate information to a larger society and that teachers who are skilled on the new information technologies are able to bring exciting learning experiences to students because using the computer, video or visiting various educational websites, can enhance developing students' learning experiences.

Had and Rashid (2019) on the use of virtual learning environment to teach English in Malaysia, noted that studies reveal a  number of factors,  which influence  teacher's  decision  to integrate ICT in the classroom. Personal characteristics such as age, gender, educational level, educational experience, experience with the

computer for educational purpose and attitude towards computers can influence the adoption of the technology (Schiller, 2003).

Jones (2004) listed seven barriers which include: lack of time for the integration, lack of confidence among teachers during integration, lack of access to resources, lack of effective training and supports, age of the teachers, lack of personal access during lesson preparation and teaching experience. Furthermore, Cheok, Wong, Ayub & Mahmud (2017) observed that stepping into any classroom in the country today is almost the same as stepping in to any classroom 20 years ago and that although the technology is used in every aspect of students' lives, it does not really happen in classrooms. Teachers revealed that their reluctance towards the use of ICT is a major barrier for ICT integration and utilization in the English language classrooms (Raman & Yamat, 2014).

Furthermore, in spite of the indispensability of digital literacy in the teaching and learning of Engligh globaly, Cindy (2018) observed gaps between teachers and students as some teachers still stick to conventional methods to conduct lessons especially in language learning classes. Some of the teachers label themselves as digital immigrants as opposed to digital natives. It is a lacking factor in language acquisition as the learners are not fully aware of their potential of exploring virtual learning environment to learn English because they are not well exposed to this by their language instructors. Apata (2021) also noted growing number of researches indicating the dearth of digital literacy skills among the teachers of English both at the local and international levels.

**Strategies for encouraging Teachers towards Digital Literacy**

Many strategies have been put forward to help every teacher towards digital learning. Jegede, et al (2017) opined that the mode of teaching should be overhauled to accommodate functional student-centred and activity-oriented instructional strategy that will make students good problem solvers and that teachers should make their lesson student-centred in congruence with the characteristics of the strategies being used to put the knowledge across.

There is need for Ministries of Education to collaborate with other educational bodies such as SUBEB, UBEC, ICT companies, among others to organize continuous professional training for teachers. Rashid (2018), emphasizing on the continuous professional development of teachers, highlighted the importance of preparing teachers professionally in order for them to be able to do their jobs effectively and that, to achieve this, continuous professional development (CPD) is conducted to centrally maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Khalid, Joyes, Ellison, & Karim (2013) and Rashid (2018) believe that professional development can be implemented through formal and informal approaches such as workshop, professional meetings and mentoring, while the informal approach can be achieved through, for example, reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to any academic discipline and others.

Today's teacher must be intelligent, organized, creative, reflective, technologically savvy, and a learner by nature as teaching is not only a work of art but also science. They should teach the students to use the Internet effectively and also help them in creating their own blogs, podcasts, movies, documentaries and websites. The Internet and the Web are global systems for communication and information (Thirumalai, 2011).

Government should see education as very important and increase annual budget allocation to education in order to pay teachers handsomely so as to motivate them and generate their interest towards ICT utilization.  Teachers must be encouraged and motivated to procure, learn and use ICT devices.

NGOs and alumni associations of schools and institutions should assist in procuring ICT facilities and virtual learning environments in order to quicken the integration into learning. They could also assist in training of teachers.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that digital skills are important for English language teachers in the 21$^{st}$ century based on current practices in the application of information and communication technology (ICT) in language education. Digital literacy will enhance both teachers' and students' activities and consequently, students' performance.  It will also help in the overall development of the total person into responsible citizens who will help in transforming the nation into enviable position globally.  Providing learners and teachers with a virtual leaning environment will help to depart from the  formal teacher-centered approach to a more informal learner-centered approach.

**Recommendations**

- Teachers should be up to date in acquiring digital literacy in order to be able to orientate students on the proper use of digital skills in language learning.

- Government should equip the public schools with ICT facilities as well as ICT tools and equipment for both teachers and students in order to create virtual learning and teaching environments that will be conducive.  This is the responsibility of a responsible government.

- Continuous well organized and structured programmes should be organized for teachers to train them on the use of ICT to enhance their integrating it into teaching and learning.  Wide gaps in training periods should be closed because this is always causing problem.

- NGOs and alumni associations of schools and institutions should assist in procuring ICT facilities and virtual learning environments in order to quicken the integration into learning.

- Curriculum planners should consider ICT integration into the curriculum of English language. Teachers should be involved in the curriculum planning since they are the ones to implement the contents of the curriculum.

- Publishers of educational materials should go digital.

- Teachers  should no longer be reluctant in changing their mindset towards the integration of ICT in the teaching process.

- In addition, teachers could seize the opportunity of the expertise of the digital natives in their classrooms.

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