



## **E-LEARNING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF YOLA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ADAMAWA STATE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explored the challenges and opportunities of digital learning in English teacher education in Nigeria. It illustrates the context of digital learning, potential opportunities for digital Learning, challenges and solutions when using digital technology in English language classroom. It explicates internal and external challenges to digital learning integration to the English teacher. It also discusses digital technology and learning as well as the way forward. The paper therefore recommended that digital technology integration in the classroom should be allowed by collaborative efforts of teachers, educational technology professionals, school administrators, researchers, and educational software personnel.*

### **Introduction**

In the digital age, the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) allows students to learn and apply the skills that they need in the 21st Century. Digital technology is the best medium which ensures the continuity of students' learning (Mansor et al., 2021). Digital technology is an alternative pedagogical approach in this era of technological development and communication, and students in particular need to be adapted to it. Mat Dawi et al. (2016) found that, in the midst of globalisation and the advancement of ICT, technology-based and online learning are highly encouraged.



Johnson, Jacovina, Russell, & Soto (2016) define digital technology as a teaching and learning process between teachers and pupils that involves various digital mediums, such as 'Whatsapp', 'Zoom', and 'Google Classroom'. In addition, online learning does not refer to direct learning alone. Any assignments or activities, provided by the teacher online, are considered part of online learning. Thus, Basar, Mansor, Jamaludin and Alias, (2021) contend that digital technology (e-learning) describes any form of pedagogy delivered using online learning. Such methods incorporate visual graphics, text, animations, videos and audio. In addition, online pedagogy can also facilitate group learning, and the assistance of instructors within specific fields.

However, Irfan and Iman (2020) contend that digital learning is ineffective and is conducted inappropriately. They demonstrate this with reference to several factors, such as unsuitable internet facilities, teachers' inability to implement digital learning, and the lack of cooperation given by parents. Furthermore, Mansor, Zabarani, Jamaludin, Mohd Nor, Alias and Mansor, (2021) found that, digital technology is effective but insufficient. They understand digital technology to be effective as a response to the urgency of the pandemic; however, learning outcome cannot be met, as it requires significant costs to purchase suitable internet packages.

### Digital Learning

Digital learning also referred to as Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) or e-learning, is the creative use of digital resources and innovations while teaching and learning. Exploring the use of emerging technology offers teachers the ability in the classes, they offer to design interactive learning environments, which can take the form of mixed or entirely online programs and courses (Celeste McLaughlin, 2018). The types of digital learning include:

**Virtual Learning:** Virtual Learning (VL) dated back to 1840, when Sir Isaac Pitman, the English inventor of shorthand, came up with the idea of delivering instruction via correspondence courses by mail. But only with the advances of modern technology has distance education grown to a multi-billion-dollar market. Virtual University (VU) at [vu.edu.pak](http://vu.edu.pak) is the best example of virtual learning with zero-physical contact but virtually 100percent connected with its e-Students. The VU is a 'university without walls', an unpacked virtual institution thus 'The University' as an institution, seizes to exist (Delgado Kloos et al., 2017).

Where content and instructions are delivered through the internet, intranet, extranet, satellite TV, and CD-ROM with multimedia capabilities. The university, then, becomes far more externally oriented; an intermediary on the global stage, acting as a collaborator, client, contractor, and broker of higher education services (Kundi & Nawaz, 2014), (Delgado Kloos et al., 2017).

**Online Learning:** Online learning is highly versatile, allowing you to research around your busy schedule conveniently. The bulk of our learners also work when they research with us digitally (Banerjee et al., 2015), (Celeste McLaughlin, 2018).

**Blended Learning:** Blended techniques use different techniques to provide learning that incorporates face-to-face experiences with online activities. In short, the alignment between the elements of the classroom and the operation that is digitally activated differs based on the learning formulation and construction. The versatility inherent in this type of delivery allows instructors to rethink where and how they concentrate educational process and learners to build self-directed learning skills and electronic literacy (Delgado Kloos et al., 2017), (Banerjee et al., 2015), (Celeste McLaughlin, 2018).



### **Potential Opportunities for Digital Learning**

Rather than anything else, education influences the prospects of a nation for human growth and competitiveness. Fortunately, in education, the knowledge revolution provides some exceptional opportunities. Common sense teaches us that different learners should be trained differently by us. Parents show this innate insight as they interact with their children differently according to their unique ages (Dinevski & Kokol, 2005). Universities and even smaller corporate divisions are being able to afford integrated digital systems (Ezziane, 2007) cited in (Kundi & Nawaz, 2014). Potential opportunities for digital learning are discussed below:

**Enhancing Teaching and Learning:** For all of our children and young people, digital technologies will enrich the learning experience. From consultation activities, we know that our students are already highly exposed to digital technology and will support its expanded use as part of their education (Scottish Government, 2015), (Education in Digital Age: Opportunities and Threats, 1994), (Nawaz & Qureshi, 2010), (Salavati, 2016), (The Scottish Government, 2015).

**Increasing ROI from K-12 and Higher Education:** Although the United States spends more of its GDP on education than other OECD nations, in terms of reaping the benefits of that investment, it does not rank among the top 10 (Banerjee et al., 2015).

**Innovation Imperative in a Global and Competitive Workplace:** Economic indicators, particularly in the United States' high-wage industries, have led towards a decline in jobs and new firm growth. The competitive effect of a working environment compounds these trends. As shown by the life sciences industry, innovation and entrepreneurship are important to driving job creation (Banerjee et al., 2015).

**Enhancing Parental and Students Engagement:** There is promising evidence that the use of digital equipment and software for direct communication with parents would improve compliance with teachers' demands for involvement, behaviour, and learning support among learners (The Scottish Government, 2015), (Banerjee et al., 2015).

**Increasing Student Enrichment:** For learners using innovation, the K-12 learning process may be more relevant, engaging, and interactive.

**Mitigating Inequality:** For many high-poverty, rural, urban and many other underserved learners who may not otherwise have access to these essential resources, designing an innovation-enriched curriculum will provide enhanced learning opportunities.

**Anywhere, Anytime and Any Place:** 24/7, the Virtual Classroom is accessible. Another strength brought about by the online learning format is time quality. Asynchronous communication via online conference programs enables the job, family, and study schedules of professional juggling to participate in class discussions (Rahman, Ahmad & Hashim, 2018).

### **Challenges of Digital Learning**

Although digital education has important strengths and provides unique access to quality education, the use of this platform has limitations that can pose potential challenges to the success of any online courses (Kundi & Nawaz, 2014).

**Computer Literacy:** To work effectively in an online environment, both students and intermediaries must possess a basic level of computer literacy. They need to be able to use a range



of search engines, for example, and to access the World Wide Web easily, as well as to be familiar with newsgroups, FTP procedures, and e-mail. They cannot excel in an online program if they do not have these technological tools; a student or faculty member who cannot work on the system can pull the whole program down (Rahman, Ahmad & Hashim, 2018).

**Lack of Teacher-Student Physical Interaction:** How much teacher contact learners get on a physical campus is easy to underestimate. Then there is the instruction time itself, with the question-and-answer in real-time. Then right before and after training, once hours, chance encounters in the corridor, there is an opportunity for discussion ... all possibilities that are not accessible for digital education (Kundi & Nawaz, 2014), (Banerjee et al., 2015), (Courses, 2019).

**Need for Self-Discipline:** In a tertiary education classroom environment, many students struggle with self-discipline. They do not have parents and teachers constantly checking in for the remainder of their time. If they miss homework to go socialize, they do not get grounded. It takes time for others, and the intrinsic drive to buckle down and do the job. It is even easier to "skip class" or place an assignment on an online course (Courses, 2019).

**Technological Difficulties:** We prefer to take it for granted that a laptop or desktop computer of the latest model is available to everyone. Not every student has had the same access to technology, however, even for a generation of digital natives. For all their online operation, many rely on their smartphone or a tablet. Some would have restricted broadband or Wi-Fi connectivity, even though all their information come from their phone plan (Rahman, Ahmad & Hashim, 2018); Cunha et al., 2020).

**Poor Time Management:** This challenge is connected to the aspect of self-discipline, but it deserves its entry. One of the main benefits of this approach is that students can learn at their speed. The profit can also be a liability, however. At the end of the term, there is a point at which "their own pace" becomes "procrastination and a crazy scramble." It is necessary to help students maintain their pace well before the deadline reaches (Courses, 2019), (Cunha et al., 2020).

**Digital Education is not suitable for Practical Courses:** For practical activities in tertiary education, digital and e-learning are incompatible. E-learning offers realistic session-related knowledge and preparation, but instead of mastering preparing, the learner does not measure their output or real-time experience. Knowing things and moving them in an unsystematic way is pointless (Naresh & Rajalakshmi M., 2017), (Cunha et al., 2020).

**Transmitting virus:** These programs attach themselves to a file and then circulate. They usually affect the data on a computer, either by altering or deleting it (Suleiman, Yahya & Tukur, 2020).

### **Challenges and Solutions When Using Digital Technology in English Language Classroom**

According to Celeste McLaughlin, (2018), there are two challenges faced by the English teachers when using digital technology in the classroom. They are external and internal challenges. The challenges to digital technology integration that are external (extrinsic) to the English teacher, including access to resources, training, and support. While the challenges that are internal to English teachers, including their attitudes and beliefs, resistance toward technology in the classroom, and their knowledge and skills.



### **External Challenges to Digital Technology Integration to the English Teacher**

External challenges must be addressed at the institutional level and changes are typically incremental (e.g., rolling out access to technology one level at a time). External challenges include inadequate training, access constraint and support constraint (Delgado Kloos et al., 2017).

#### **Inadequate Training Related to Digital Technology**

English teachers will not be capable of using digital technology to its full potential if they are not provided with effective professional development on new digital technologies. The most important reason for lack of technology implementation in the English classroom is inadequate professional development and training. According to Johnson, Jacovina, Russell and Soto (2016), English teachers today report increasing confidence using classroom digital technology, operating software, and searching the internet, but given that digital technology is constantly changing, it is more important than ever that English teachers stay up-to-date with their digital technological expertise. Even if a school district were to hire only English teachers who were literate in current classroom technology, countless new technologies will be developed during their teaching careers, and they will need to undergo additional training to keep their skills current. Without the necessary resources to provide continuous technological training, schools and districts will continue to cite inadequate professional development as a major barrier to digital technology implementation.

The specific type of training that is available to English teachers is also an important consideration. For example, many schools are purchasing iPads; however, the usefulness of iPads for education is not always immediately clear. One weakness of the iPad is the difficulty in typing using the touch keyboard, making it less ideal for activities requiring students to generate text, such as writing practice. To realize effective digital technology integration, school administrators should seek assistance to identify and provide ongoing training (Delgado Kloos et al., 2017).

#### **Access Constraint Related to Digital Technology**

If an English teacher's school does not possess adequate computers and fast internet connection, the implementation of educational digital technology is not feasible. Certainly, the most basic step toward effective digital technology integration is widespread access to equipment necessary to run educational computer programs. If computer lab time is limited to one hour per week, persistent use of educational technology is not viable (Ahmed, Patrick & Karsten, 2016).

Many students do not have regular and reliable access to a computer. Inconsistent computer access makes it extremely difficult for instructors to integrate digital technology into existing lesson plans. Routine access to hardware (i.e., laptops or tablets), software (e.g., reading and writing software, internet browsers), and internet connection is a fundamental requirement.

#### **Support Challenges to Digital Technology Integration**

Another challenge that organizations face is a lack of support for employees. Without proper support, employees may struggle to use the new technology effectively, which can lead to frustration and resistance. Support challenges to digital technology integration include inadequate technical support and administrative/peer support. It is clear that the English teachers of today do not have optimal access to technological support. According to Johnson, Jacovina, Russell and Soto (2016), 68% of school districts reported having adequate support for educational digital technology. While it is encouraging to see that the majority of responding districts feel that they have access to adequate support, there is clearly room for improvement. With additional digital technology support, English teachers can worry less about technological barriers and instead focus





on teaching their students. Adopting a new educational digital technology can be a time-consuming process. If a technology is adopted school-wide, English teachers should have access to extended support from trained professionals, as opposed to a single hour-long meeting before the school day begins. Of course, this will most likely require additional funding for schools, but creators of educational digital technologies should also place increased emphasis on user support. With high quality support from both creators of educational digital technologies and school employees, teachers will have access to the resources they deserve. The knowledge that is readily available may in turn increase acceptance of classroom digital technologies.

### **Internal Challenges to Digital Technology Integration to the English Teacher**

Individual educators are ultimately responsible for using digital technology, and thus even when given resources, they have choices about how to use digital technology. The internal challenges relate specifically to English teachers, their beliefs, and their knowledge (Celeste McLaughlin, 2018).

**English Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs:** Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are crucial factors in determining the role and effectiveness of technology in classrooms. Attitudes and beliefs about both educational technology and pedagogy in general will ultimately influence how English teachers implement technology.

**Confidence in skills and knowledge:** Given the abundance of available educational technology, it is essential that English teachers feel comfortable and confident about their ability to use them effectively. Many current teachers grew up without access to technologies like the personal computer and the internet, but students today are raised in an environment saturated by computer technology. These “digital natives” can intimidate English teachers, especially English teachers with little digital technological experience. If English teachers feel they do not have the necessary competencies when using technology, they may feel less in control of the class, use less technology, and be unlikely to explore new possibilities that utilize technology when designing their classes. In a survey of 764 teachers, Wozney, Venkatesh, and Abrami (2006) cited in Johnson, Jacovina, Russell and Soto (2016) found that one of the two strongest predictors of teachers' digital technology use were confidence in achieving instructional goals using digital technology. English teachers who believe they lack training can either decide to work with digital technology at their current level of expertise, or postpone the use of technology until they consider that they have sufficient competence. To build teachers' knowledge to a sufficient level, boosting confidence in the process, training and support from the educational administrators are necessary.

### **Digital Technology and Learning**

English teachers may use digital technology throughout the curriculum or to complement a specific lesson. Variations in digital technology usage reflect important differences in English teachers' beliefs about the utility of technology in the educational process. According to Rahman, Ahmad and Hashim (2018), “English teachers were able to enact digital technology integration practices that closely aligned with their beliefs.” These beliefs are greatly influenced by the English teachers' philosophy regarding how students learn. If English teacher regards student learning as primarily dependent on explicit English teacher teaching, classroom activities will be driven by the traditional chalk-and-talk approach. More traditional educational beliefs have been related to less integration of computer-based technology in Classrooms. Thus, the use of technology will likely be limited to supplementary demonstrative activities within particular educational units. Therefore, for English



teachers to achieve effective use of computers, they must experience a paradigm shift from the teacher centered classroom to the student-centered classroom (Muhammad & Gambo, 2020).

### **The way Forward**

Some of the strategies that can be used by educators and researchers alike to encourage digital technology integration are:

**English Teacher Autonomy:** It is extremely important that teachers have a say in what digital technologies they will use in their instruction. Teaching is a deeply personal experience, and when educators feel as though they have lost the ability to teach in a manner that best suits them, it can be frustrating and discouraging. No single educational digital technology will be perfect for every English teacher, and educators should have the ability to select a digital technology that they feel most comfortable with. By allowing English teachers more freedom of choice they will retain the very important sense of classroom control.

**Available Digital Technologies:** While a typical internet search will turn up thousands of results for educational technology tools, there are very few places that effectively organize and evaluate available technologies. English teachers should be able to easily find and access rigorously tested technologies within a specific learning domain. In fact, this study can serve as a valuable resource to English teachers looking to find such technologies. Better organization of empirically validated educational technologies will serve to save valuable time and will place less of a burden on the teacher (Johnson, Jacovina, Russell, and Soto, 2016).

**Feedback:** Digital technology can further support instruction by allowing English teachers to provide feedback through word documents. However, training on the capabilities of different technologies might allow English teachers to further optimize the experience for students. Programs such as myAccess or the Writing Pal can provide automated immediate feedback, increasing the efficiency with which students receive feedback.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The government should take responsibility and improve the existing online infrastructure and facilities. Nevertheless, support within school communities, and among parents and school administrators, is vital to ensure the success of digital learning.

- i. Effective educators must not only be domain experts, but also understand how to flexibly use the affordances of different pedagogies for particular content topics.
- ii. Teacher training that highlights constructivism and student-centered education should be provided.
- iii. TEACHERS training on the intersection of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge should be provided.
- iv. Digital technology integration in the classroom should be allowed by collaborative efforts of teachers, educational technology professionals, school administrators, researchers, and educational software personnel.



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