

Exploring Technological Resources in English as Second Language (ESL) Teaching and Learning in Turbulent and Uncertain Times

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Abstract

The educational space in Nigeria was considerably affected by the recent COVID -19 pandemic which plagued the world. So many educational activities around the world were disrupted as a result of the lockdown which was occasioned by the incident. In particular, developing countries like Nigeria were worse hit because their educational system had for long relied solely on the traditional teaching method which operated through physical classroom contact. This paper thus explored the incorporation of technological resources in the English as Second Language (ESL) classroom in turbulent and uncertain times which is considered as the “new normal” with the aim of helping to address the challenge of having to shutdown institutions during uncertain times. The data for the study was collected using an online survey which targeted lecturers of English in three institutions in Plateau State – University of Jos, Plateau State University and Plateau State Polytechnic. The data was then analysed quantitatively and qualitatively by presenting the frequencies of the responses of the twenty two respondents from the survey before interpreting the results. The paper made use of the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) theory as theoretical framework because the theory supports the use of ICT in the ESL classroom. The paper discovered among other findings that while a good number of lecturers admitted to using technological tools in teaching and learning, some have never utilized any form of technological innovations in teaching because they lack the technological expertise to effectively utilize modern technologies. The paper recommended increasing the value of ICT in ESL teaching and learning in turbulent and uncertain times as a way of developing Nigeria’s educational system and to ensure that students compete favorably with their contemporaries around the world. Also, there is a need for training and retraining of staff and even students in the use of ICT resources in teaching and learning as it is being done presently in the University of Jos.

Key words: ESL, CALL, Covid-19, ICT, teaching and learning, technological innovation.

Introduction

For a very long time, physical contact in the classroom has been the primary method of teaching and learning in Nigeria. Even though technology has largely replaced the physical method of instruction in the world of education, particularly in teaching and learning, this evolution was barely noticeable or nonexistent in Nigerian educational institutions. The country's development was hampered by a number of factors, including lack of funding, infrastructure problems, a skilled workforce unprepared to handle new technology, poor internet access, and bureaucratic bottlenecks, among others.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which affected teaching and learning all over the world with developing countries like Nigeria worse hit, there were calls across quarters for Nigeria to fully embrace and incorporate technology in its classrooms to facilitate the teaching and learning of process and produce students who would be wholly transformed to be able to compete favourably with their counterparts across the globe. The response to this call remained so much unanswered until COVID-19 forced a rethink and redirected the future of teaching and learning in the country. This brought about dramatic changes in the way we live our lives such as the lockdown policies which forced an overnight transition to online teaching platforms throughout the world.

Nigerian institutions remained permanently closed throughout the pandemic as a result of the lockdown brought on by the pandemic, while countries that had integrated technology into their classrooms were still able to teach their students from home.

It is crucial to reconsider how classes will be taught and how students will learn in the "new normal" of the post-COVID-19 era, which is characterized by turbulence and uncertainty. Due to the significance of technology in education, 100% technology integration in the classroom has become the new norm. According to Ryn and Sandaran (2020), ICT was introduced in education as a way to aid teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. This is due to the fact that using the Internet and an intranet allows students to search for any information they require, which is crucial for broadening their perspective. However, thanks to the Internet, teachers can find a variety of educational resources to meet the needs of their students. They can also upload their own ideas to websites to share them with other users.

Similar to this, Coleman, Gibson, Cotten, Howell-Moroney, and Stringer (2016) argued that when ICT is used effectively, the learning environment shifts from being teacher-centered to being learner-centered. By shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning, the learning environment is made more interactive and engaging for both teachers and students, and the teacher's role is transformed from that of a knowledge transmitter to one of a facilitator, knowledge navigator, and co-learner.

According to Keengwe, Onchwari, and Wachira (2008), the use of multi-media technologies (i.e., those that combine text, graphics, video, animation, and audio) in teaching and learning ensures that classroom instruction is delivered in a way that is highly effective, interesting, motivating, interactive, and of high quality while meeting the needs of a variety of learners. In these trying pandemic times, e-learning has been chosen and brings with it changes in teaching-learning strategies that are logically based on the use of ICT tools (Torrecillas, 2020).

Teachers must therefore possess the knowledge and abilities to use new digital tools in order to support all students in achieving high academic standards given the importance attached to the use of technology in the classroom. The degree of ICT integration in teacher education programs affects the quality of professional development for educators. The traditional classroom is being replaced by one that encourages two-way communication, which

encourages interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, the teacher needs to be ready to work with various technologies in order to use them in the classroom to make teaching and learning interesting (Bhattacharjee & Deb 2016).

In order to succeed in the implementation of technology in classroom, and particularly in English as Second Language (ESL) teaching and learning, it is important to ensure that both students and lecturers are competent enough to utilize the resources. This study however investigates the use of technology in the ESL classroom with particular focus on the lecturers of English in three tertiary institutions in Plateau State: University of Jos, Plateau State University, Bokokos and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin-Ladi.

A teacher can benefit from ICT in the following ways: It is beneficial to teachers' professional growth. With the use of information and communication technologies, a teacher can acquire a variety of language skills. He is able to complete a variety of certification programmes in English language instruction offered by renowned universities around the world. By using e-journals, e-magazines, and e-libraries—which are only possible with the use of ICT—a teacher can expand his domain of knowledge in the English language and improve his ability to teach the language. These programmes also help to make the subject matter easier to understand and more affordable.

Through audio and video conferencing, instructors can engage in talks and conferences with professionals in the field of English language teaching (ELT) to enhance their knowledge and abilities. ICT also enables teachers to acquire cutting-edge teaching techniques. They can collaborate with the children on a range of tasks and projects. Through the use of information and communication technologies, teachers can participate in a variety of in-service training programmes and workshops that are crucial for their professional development. Additionally, ICT enables teachers to advise their students about the English language resources that are readily available online, such as e-books, e-journals, e-magazines, and social media platforms like LinkedIn that promote English language proficiency.

ICT is also useful to teachers while creating English language learning curricula. They can research the benefits and drawbacks, difficulties, and social and psychological concerns pertaining to English language learners by studying the ELT curricula of other nations. All of these factors play a part in creating a curriculum that helps English language teachers accomplish their goals.

The aim of this paper thus is to determine the level of competence of academics in the use of ICT tools, whether they have been utilizing technology in their classroom and also how relevant they consider technology in teaching and learning English in the new normal.

Literature Review

The current study investigates the utilization of technology in ESL teaching and learning in turbulent and uncertain times. The discussion in this section reports on relevant literature on

the use of ICT in the classrooms, the benefits of ICT in the classroom among other aspects. The relevance of ICT in language teaching and learning has become the focus of research among academics in recent years. ICT has become a useful tool which helps students to acquire the target language in an easy manner. For ESL learners, technology will help them acquire English language slowly without them realizing it.

Language learning is a process that takes time and is influenced by the learner's environment and the tools they use; computer and internet are powerful tools for learning a second language that are great for practicing the four skills—listening, writing, speaking, and reading. According to Singhal, technology and English language are linked with each other (Singhal, 1997). More than half a century ago technology was interfering in English language teaching by using cassettes, microphones and headphones while the teachers were monitoring the process. A great advantage of this early process of using technology was that the students were improving and festering their learning of the second learning language because of speaking the new language (Singhal, 1997).

Becker (2000) asserted that teacher-provided ICT activities offer more chances for active, independent learning, which can boost students' motivation to learn. Simin and Mohammad Sani's (2015) assertion that ICT will give students more student-centered activities where they must research and discover the learning input on their own rather than solely relying on the teacher's input is supported by this information. According to White (2009), the use of the internet in schools has made it possible for information to be shared in social networks. This has allowed students to interact with one another and share ideas and thoughts, which has facilitated learning. White (2009) stated that information and data are always transmitted via ICT in two forms, namely the synchronized form (i.e. Facebook, Friendster, Twitter, Blogging, and e-learning) and the asynchronized form (i.e. time is required for the sharing of information to occur, and this includes the use of Yahoo mail, Hotmail). An elevated level of motivation and grammatical complexity can be achieved by setting up a discussion group on Facebook and assigning students weekly questions to respond to. This results in some very beneficial enhancements in grammar and spelling as well as grammatical complexity, which has led to students engaging in self-learning and starting to use English for informal communication (White, 2009).

The incorporation of these ICT tools has caused changes in the educational field. These changes are evident in the teaching and learning methodologies used, as well as in the opportunities for innovation and skill development for adaptation to the changes that educational institutions have had to make as a result of the current pandemic. In the exceptional circumstances brought on by the impact of COVID-19, new technologies have greatly aided in fulfilling substantive functions in higher education, with their virtual applications greatly improving education reaching university student. According to Suárez, Almerich, Orellana, and Dáz (2018), the use of ICTs allows for the availability of global resources like digital libraries, where professors, students, and professionals can access and share research and course materials anytime and anywhere 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This makes it possible to access knowledge and

stay current with modern developments in the world of education and in other areas of development.

The adoption and integration of ICTs, which offer higher order skills like solving challenging real-world problems, can enable new educational approaches to be implemented in the process of teaching and learning, according to Knezek and Christensen (2016). This will enhance students' perceptions of and understanding of the learning process. By stating that the adoption and integration of ICTs into the teaching and learning environment offers more opportunities for teachers and students to work better in a globalized digital age, Lawrence and Tar (2018) provided support for this assertion.

According to Pittman and Gaines (2015), the presence of technological resources in the classroom benefits learning as long as the instructor is inspired to use them. Teachers should only adopt and incorporate ICTs into teaching and learning activities if they have the technical know-how to do so, as having the technology in the classrooms without the necessary skills to use it makes the whole process pointless.

From the review, it is apparent that technology is useful in the classroom and therefore it is important for both teachers and students to possess the technological skills to be able to effectively utilize ICT in teaching and learning especially in turbulent and uncertain times.

Theoretical Framework

The development of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) dates back to the mid-1950s, when technology was first incorporated into language instruction. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is a subset of the broader term "computer-assisted instruction," according to Davies and Higgins (1982, p. 3). This is so because "computer-assisted instruction" as a whole includes CALL. A subset of CAI is CALL. On the other hand, language teachers are more likely to favor a strategy that places the learner at the center of instruction. As a result, CALI started to lose ground to CALL, which places a stronger emphasis on learning than instruction. Levy (1997) defined "CALL" as "the search for and study of computer applications in language teaching and learning." It encompasses a wide range of ICTs, apps, and teaching and learning techniques for foreign languages. Even though computers have been around since the beginning of the 20th century, academic use did not begin until the late 1960s. The development of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which makes use of technology for linguistic purposes, started in the 1970s as a result of advancements in research and the development of environments that are conducive to language learning.

A method for utilizing technology in the study of languages is known as computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL is described as a method of language teaching and learning that incorporates a significant amount of interactive computer technology to help with presentation, reinforcement, and assessment of learning objectives. The use of a multimedia CD-ROM combining text, pictures, audio, and video files for the purpose of teaching English

as a second language is referred to as the CALL in light of this definition and for the purposes of this study. Studies on the impact of CALL on language learning have been conducted all over the world. A study by Teo (2009) showed that CALL has a positive impact on students' learning and competency. In other words, CALL has attracted a lot of interest from different sources, such as researchers and writers. The computerization of education, a more recent educational innovation, is a complex process in which numerous agents are involved.

Because of the adaptability and standardization of the overall educational process they provide, using CALL for teaching activities has gained widespread acceptance as a method of knowledge transfer (Graham, 2013). However, for learning technology to be successful, it must be integrated into the curriculum. Getting a hold of new technology and mastering new technological things has proven to be the main obstacle to keeping things interesting, particularly in teaching. Due to their flexibility and ability to standardize the entire educational process, CALL has evolved into a widely accepted method of knowledge transfer. It is more significant, particularly to the university lecturers who serve as the primary repository of knowledge. It is obvious that attention must be paid to faculty attitudes and how they influence their participation in online learning and other teaching methods that incorporate technology. Teachers who were familiar with computers used to worry about using computers back then. However, many academics have recently become interested in using computer-assisted language learning (CALL).

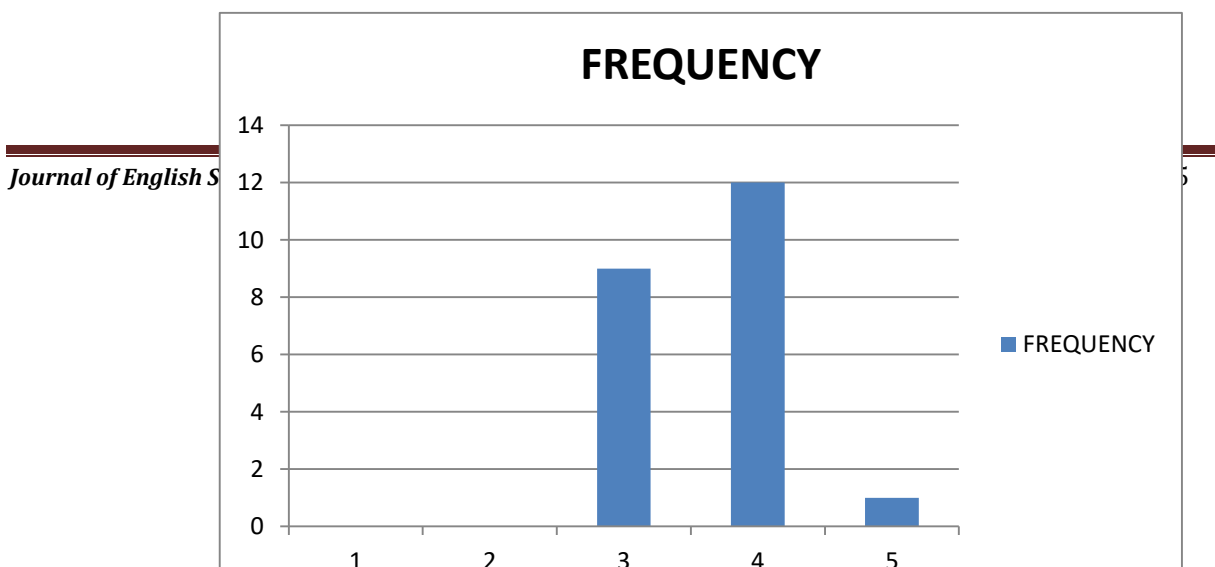
To effectively use CALL tools in the classroom, teachers must develop their agent skills. This is made possible by adopters having a positive teacher attitude, which makes them more at ease using the tools and more likely to incorporate them into their lessons (Bullock, 2004). Positive attitudes frequently encourage teachers who are less tech savvy to pick up the necessary skills so they can use CALL-based tasks in the classroom. Although computer-based language teaching materials (also known as computer assisted language learning or CAL) first appeared in the early 1980s, they are still not widely used.

Methodology

The data for the study was collected through an online survey which involved twenty two lecturers of English in three tertiary institutions in Plateau State which are University of Jos, Plateau State University, Boko, and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin-Ladi. The analysis was carried out quantitatively and qualitatively by representing the frequency of the responses on bar charts followed by the interpretation of the graphic representation of the data. The findings of the study were derived from the result of the analysis.

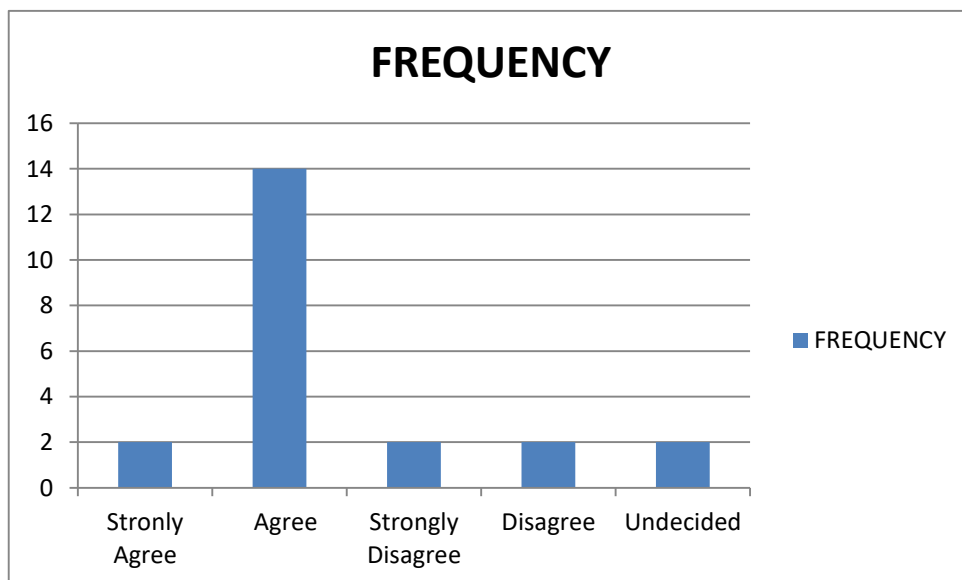
Data Presentation and Discussion

(a) On a scale of 1-5, what is your ICT level?



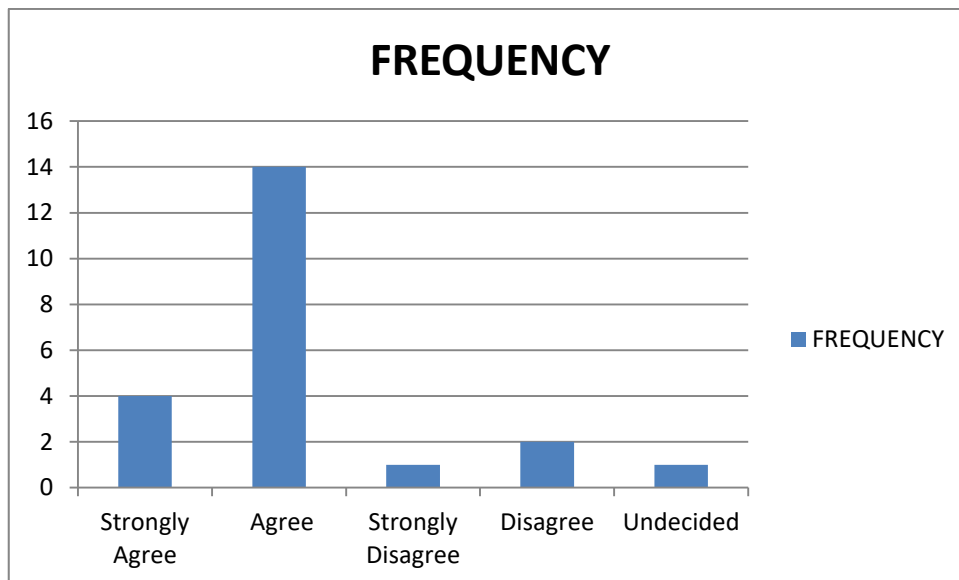
The chart indicates the level of ICT competence among the respondents and the responses indicate that out the 22 respondents scored on a scale of 1 – 5, only 1 indicated firm competence in the mastery of ICT. 12 respondents are good in the use of ICT while 9 are average in their mastery of ICT. What this suggests is that more training is needed to shift the level more to the upper level such that more academics become firm in their handling of ICT tools for effective teaching and learning in the ESL classroom particularly in turbulent and uncertain times where competence in this area remains sacrosanct.

(b) You use technology in your ESL lectures.



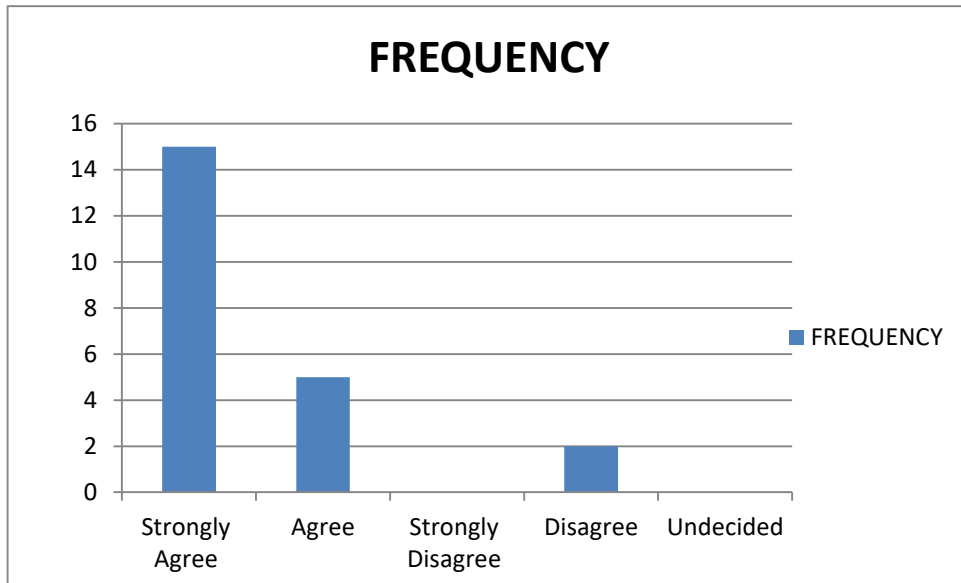
On whether academics utilize technology in their ESL classrooms, from the 22 respondents, 14 indicated that they utilize technology in their academic activities in class but that is far from having a complete utilization of technology in the classroom because only 2 respondents fully utilize technology. The response from the 14 is an indication of the utilization of the technology to a certain degree but not to a total degree. 2 respondents disagreed in strong terms that they never utilize any form of technology in their lectures; 2 disagreed to having at any point made use of technology in their ESL classrooms while the remaining 2 were not sure as to whether they actually deploy technology or not.

(c) *You have used digital platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, Skype, YouTube, PPM, Telegram, WhatsApp, etc for teaching and learning ESL.*



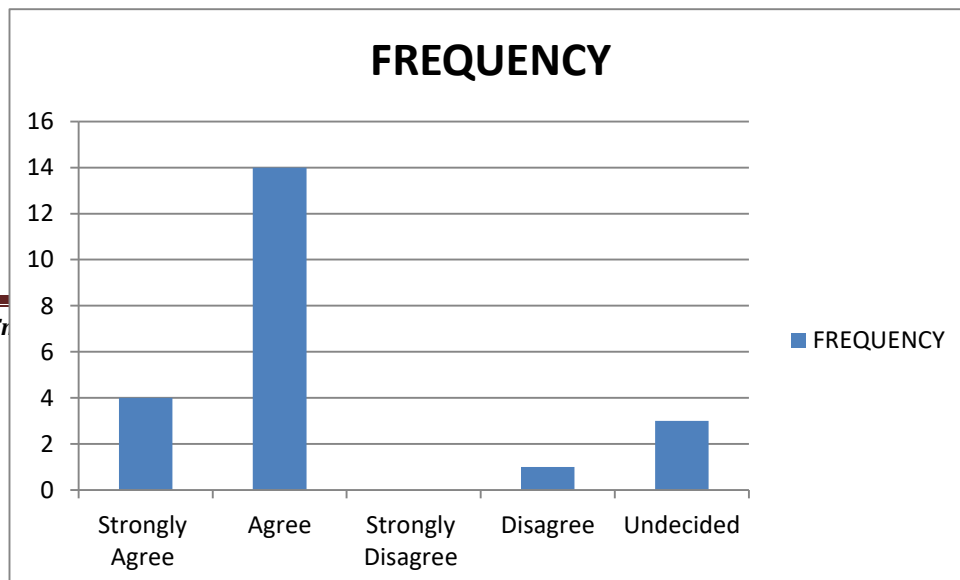
The chart indicates that regarding the use of digital tools like Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, Skype, YouTube, PPM, Telegram, WhatsApp, etc for teaching and learning ESL, 14 out of the 22 respondents agreed to utilizing these tools though not to the degree of completely adopting same because the result shows that only 4 respondents expressed strong opinion of utilizing these tools. 1 respondent does not in any way make use of the tools, 2 disagreed over the use of the tools while 1 is undecided over the utilization of the tools.

(d) *The use of technology in advancing ESL teaching and learning is key to facilitating effective teaching and learning.*



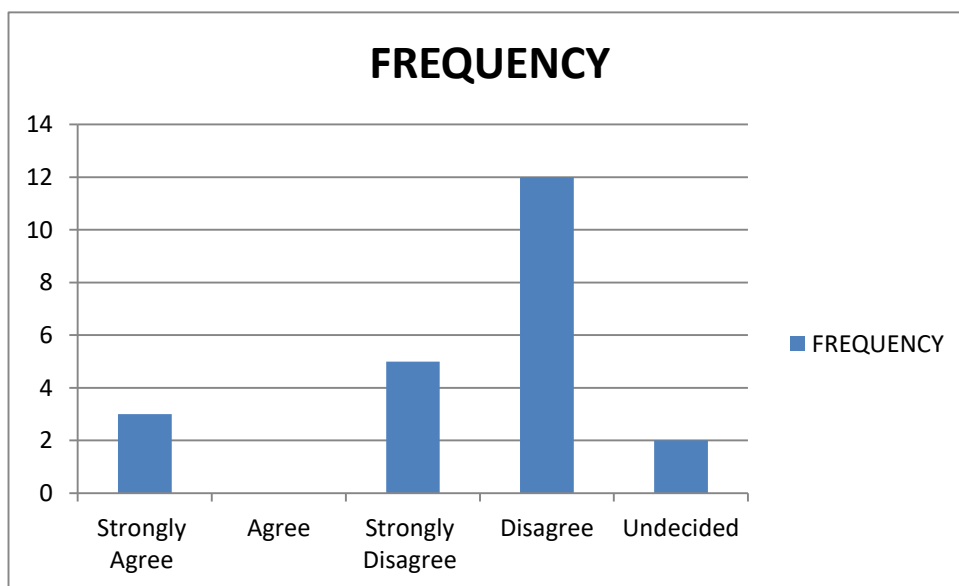
In response to question 4 which sought to find out the relevance of technology in facilitating ESL teaching and learning, 15 respondents are in strong agreement with the opinion, 5 expressed agreement though not to a total degree while 2 do not in any way see how key technology is in facilitating teaching and learning.

(e) You are aware of the application of Unijos eLearning platform in the classroom.



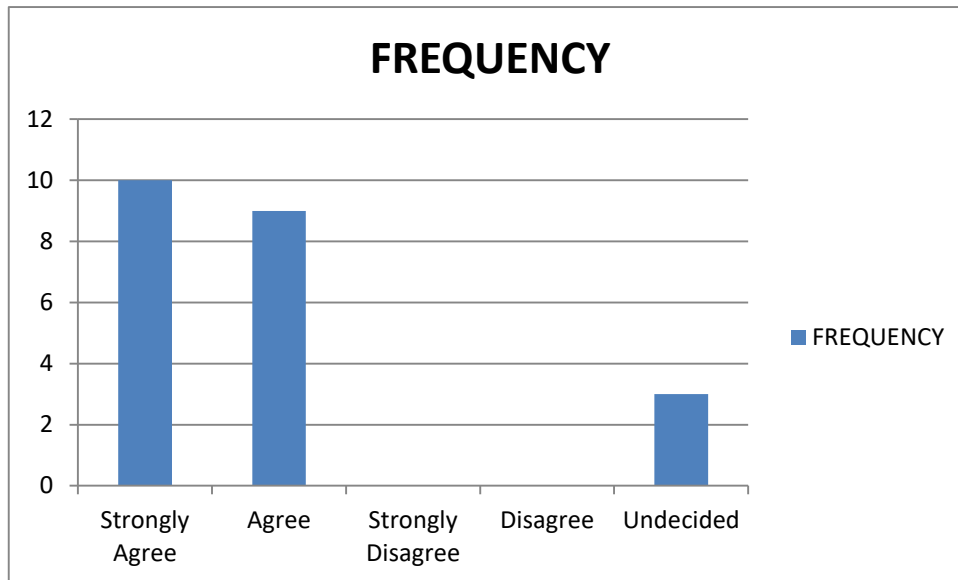
University of Jos has an eLearning platform and the question sought to know how aware the academics were about the platform for their utilization. 14 respondents agreed to being aware of the platform, 4 were more confident in expressing their agreement indicating the possibility that they might have at some point utilized the platform. 1 respondent disagreed to having any knowledge of such platform while 3 were not sure what the platform was.

(f) *Online learning resources should replace the traditional classroom physical contact system in ESL teaching.*



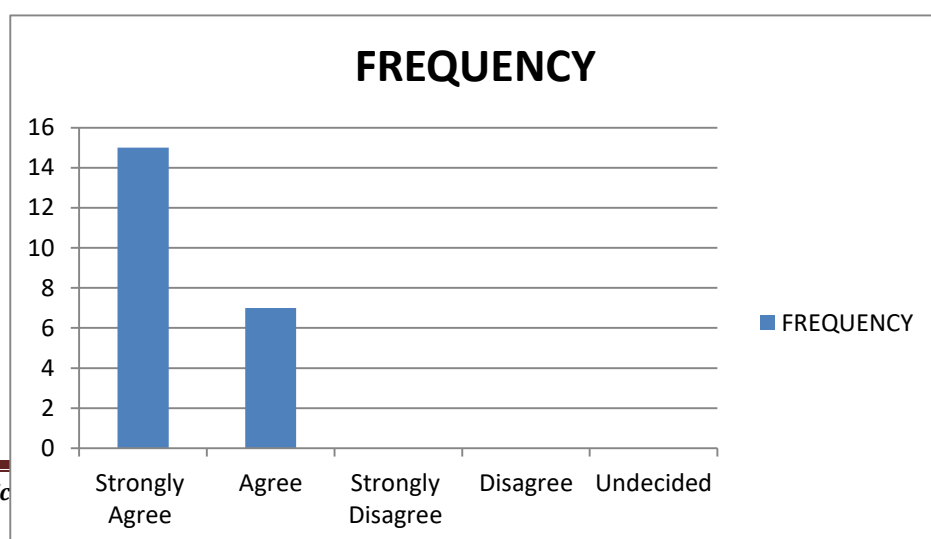
The responses from question 6 regarding the replacement of traditional ESL teaching method with online resources, 12 respondents out of 22 disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed with the opinion while 2 were not sure about the opinion. 3 respondents were however strongly in agreement with the opinion.

(g) *ICT should be made compulsory for all students in the Humanities.*



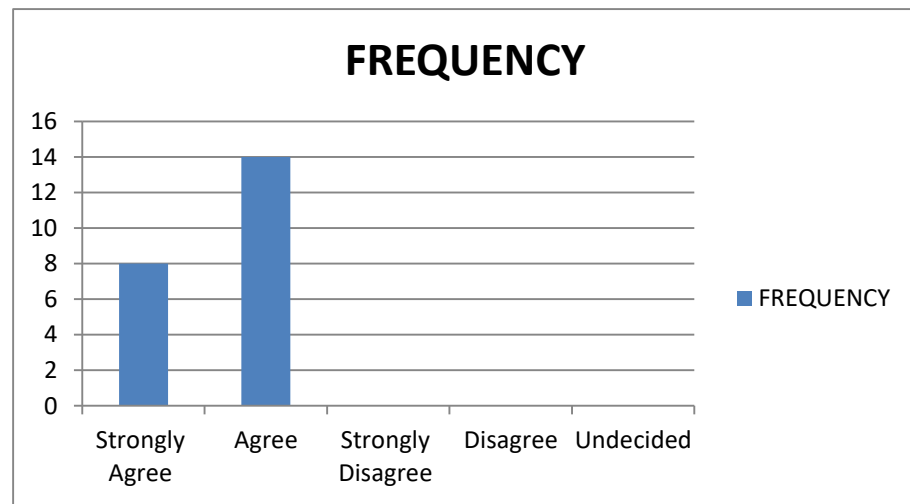
Regarding question 7 whether ICT should be made compulsory for all students in the Humanities, 10 and 9 respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the view respectively. This shows that the respondents recognise the relevance of ICT in learning. 3 respondents however remained undecided as to whether the opinion was good or not.

(h) *There is need for the training of academics in the Humanities on the application of ICT in the classroom.*



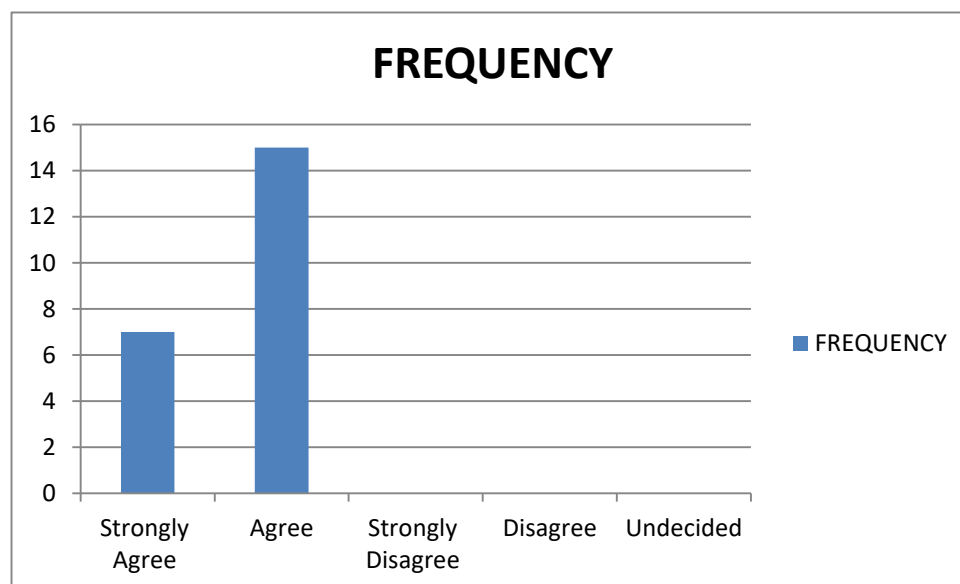
The responses from question 8 as to whether there is a need for academics in the Humanities to be trained on the application of ICT in the classroom, all 22 respondents supported the position with 15 strongly agreeing and 7 indicating “agreed.” This proves that there is a gap in the knowledge base regarding ICT utilization that needs to be filled.

(i) *A hybrid method should be used in ESL teaching and learning.*



Regarding the view that a hybrid system should be adopted in ESL teaching and learning, 8 respondents strongly agreed and 14 indicated ‘agreed.’ The implication is that both methods are quite important and should be used side by side. This way, in turbulent times, the effect will not be felt the way it was during the recent Covid-19 pandemic where schools were shut across the country.

- (j) *There should be a deliberate policy formulation and implementation of ICT based learning in our institutions to facilitate ESL teaching and research in order to comply with the “New Normal” post pandemic style of learning.*



On whether there should be a policy formulation and implementation of ICT based ESL learning in our institutions to facilitate teaching and research in order to comply with the “New Normal” post pandemic style of learning, 7 out of the 22 respondents strongly agreed while 15 agreed. This indicates that it is necessary to utilize technology in ESL teaching and learning particularly through a hybrid process as part of the global practices since Covid-19 pandemic which has ushered the world to a New Normal way of teaching and learning.

Results

- (a) There are academics who do not believe that technology is key to facilitating ESL teaching and learning.
- (b) A good number – 18 out of 22 respondents utilize online resources in ESL teaching and learning, which is an encouraging response.
- (c) There is need for improvement in computer literacy/competence level among academics if they must succeed in incorporating technology in their ESL classrooms.

- (d) While 18 respondents were aware of the University of Jos eLearning platform, 4 were not. This calls for awareness and training on the use of the platform.
- (e) 17 respondents do not accept the view that online learning resources should replace traditional ESL classroom/physical teaching method. 2 respondents were not sure while only 3 were in support of that view.
- (f) Traditional teaching method is still very much relevant and technology should only be incorporated into the teaching and learning of ESL and not be replaced.
- (g) ICT should be made compulsory for all students in the Humanities to prepare them for uncertain times.
- (h) There is a gap in ICT utilization in the ESL classroom because of inadequate knowledge of the utilization of the technological resources.

Conclusion

The lessons learned from COVID-19 have altered the nature of education and the post-COVID-19 era, also known as the New Normal, now encourages e-learning. Although the traditional ESL teaching approach is still in use, there is advocacy for a hybrid approach that incorporates the virtual method because technology has been gaining ground in a new way. This new development of bringing technology into the ESL classroom now means a change from face-to-face to virtual methods which imply that traditional teaching methods, which focus primarily on teacher-centered instruction, must change. In contrast, e-learning places the student at the center of the teaching and learning process, with the teacher acting as the student's sole guide toward autonomous and collaborative learning.

The chance that COVID-19 presents us with to rethink education in a new way and sense that even considers curriculum changes should be valued. This will result in the development of new skills and abilities aimed at new learning routes, fundamentally considering elements like interaction with content, interaction with teachers, and interaction between peers. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that, at the very least, traditional methods of instruction are still required in some capacity in ESL classrooms after the pandemic. In order for this to occur, ESL lecturers must be flexible, innovative, and actively involve their students. To do this, they must test and assess various pedagogies, including how well they work with various technological tools. A hybrid approach to teaching and learning that combines online and in-person components has a lot of exciting potential. Today, every facet of education makes use of ICT. Utilizing computers, the Internet, television, radio, projectors, cell phones, email, online audio and video conferencing, and other applications has made training and teaching more engaging and practical. It also helps with time, energy, and financial savings. Thus, we can conclude that ICT is essential to the teaching and learning process. As a result, it is also crucial for language learning, particularly for learning English.

Recommendations

- (i) Professional development and training programmes are necessary for ESL lecturers because they would give them the chance to occasionally learn more about new

technological advancements. Additionally, these programmes will make sure lecturers stay current on how to use new technology and a variety of resources that help to enhance teaching and learning. Basic skill of ICT should be introduced into ESL curriculum to equip students with 21st century skills in their learning environment to prepare them for uncertain times.

- (ii) There should be an increase in the value of ICT in ESL teaching and learning in turbulent and uncertain times as a way of developing Nigeria's educational system and to ensure that students compete favorably with their contemporaries around the world.
- (iii) There is a need for training of students in the use of ICT resources in learning as it is being done presently in the University of Jos because ICT benefits students by developing their confidence in ESL classrooms and in developing competency to be more successful in the New Normal.

Limitations of ICT Tools

- (i) Students frequently fall short of the intended learning outcomes of English language instruction.
- (ii) Because they have more time and space to themselves, students frequently lose sight of their goals and engage in pointless work.
- (iii) Repeated use of recorded programmes produces boredom in the students and that contributes to the problem of indiscipline in the classroom.
- (iv) Because they have less opportunity to actively engage in the teaching and learning process, students typically stay passive and inactive during it.
- (v) Teachers who lack technical training and experience in the TLP are required to use ICT tools.

From the above discussion, obviously ICT instruments have changed the worldview of English language showing growing experience. So it is fundamental for an educator to be knowledgeable about current ICT devices and use them appropriately to accomplish the points of English language instruction.

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