Exploring the use of Web 2.0 Tools in Teaching English in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

With the demand of globalization, creative and innovative ways of accessing learning information should be embraced in secondary schools. Web 2.0 technologies demonstrate interest in learning. This study explored the use of weblogs and podcasts in teaching English language. 36 teachers of English in Kisumu West Sub County participated in the survey. Findings from the study revealed that Web 2.0 tools could enhance the teaching of English though many schools lacked resources. However, Web 2.0 tools could be accessed on smart phones. The study concluded that Web 2.0 tools should be embedded in the curriculum as learners become active in a collaborative and interactive learning environment. The study recommended that schools should be equipped with computers or use mobile learning to enable integration of Web 2.0 tools. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology should facilitate internet connection to schools or provide technological resource centres for access to such technologies.

Relevance to innovation. Use of Web 2.0 tools creates a social, interactive and collaborative learning environment where learners scaffold one another when they create and share materials at the same time giving comments. A learner centred environment is enabled as learners ensure effectiveness in the work shared knowing it is meant for a wider audience. Besides, learning is not restricted to the confines of the classroom but rather information can be accessed once one has an internet enabled phone. The teacher on the other hand can use m-learning by projecting learning materials on an interactive board..

Keywords. Collaboration, English Language, Podcasts, Web 2.0 tools, Weblogs.

Introduction

With the increase in technology, learning through the internet has introduced innovative ways of teaching such as Web 2.0 tools. Web 2.0 tools are internet tools that allow users interact and create content. According to Hartshorne and Ajjan (2009), Web 2.0 technologies support active and social learning since feedback is meaningful when learners

share information, thus providing a scaffold creating a Zone of Proximal Development. Richardson (2009) argues that Web 2.0 has the potential to create interactive learning environments in which learners become knowledge creators, producers, editors, and evaluators. Students become responsible for learning as they produce and consume educational information making them active. According to (Cochrane, 2010) using Web 2.0 tools has made teaching methods shift from instructive pedagogical paradigm to a social constructivist pedagogical paradigm, where students are active participants.

Integrating Web 2.0 in classrooms promotes meaningful learning and failure of utilization of Web 2.0 services in classrooms, jeopardizes the culture of discourse for young people in the way in which they interact socially. In addition, Web 2.0 tools enable curriculum designers to design a curriculum that is more learner centred and interactive (Bower, et al., 2010). Moreover, the teacher of today can choose to integrate technology in the curriculum while ensuring that appropriate technologies are selected and how the student would utilize them. The use of Web 2.0 tools such as podcast and weblogs in the curriculum bring about collaboration and increased learning content since the students create topics and access educational materials shared and communicated by others. Being a social network, users create a forum for discussion and brainstorming making students to think critically (Dede, 2005). Therefore, making use of such technologies creates an interactive virtual classroom where learners work in collaboration creating materials while at the same time gaining relevant information.

Web 2.0 technologies are open in nature and easy to use. Besides, using Web 2.0 technologies does not restrict learning in a classroom set up. The learner today who is immersed in the digital media can access relevant information as long as an internet enabled phone is available. In support Ogunsaju (2009) argues that teachers should enliven lessons by keeping abreast of current updates in subject of specialization. Being aware of technologies, enable teachers become creative on ways of teaching and transforming education practices into constructive learning. As Jones and Cuthrell, (2011) reported; Web 2.0 tools are being incorporated into the academic arena from preschool to university to enhance learning in an innovative manner. Moreover, the elementary school age child today obtains information via various interactive sources including social networking sites, where they are able to witness events as they happen, rather than simply reading a traditional hardcopy newspaper (Jones & Cuthrell). It is therefore necessary that the student in secondary school utilizes Web 2.0 tools to enhance the learning of English; as integrating of web 2.0 tools in education will lead to a shift from teacher centered delivery of information to an interactive learner centered teaching.

The purpose of this study was to explore the integration of Weblogs and Podcasts in the teaching of English language in secondary schools.

Literature review

Use of information communication technology in teaching

The Internet provides learning opportunities for students to connect with educational materials available on the web. Information Communication Technologies (ICT) are defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to

create, disseminate, store, and manage information. Such tools include communication devices or application such as; projector, radio, television, cellular phones, computer, internet network, hardware and software, satellite systems and various services associated with them for example video conferencing and distance learning. These tools can be used to facilitate learning by both the teacher and the students. Technological tools provide additional motivation (Thompson, 2007) as the students can access social networks for interaction with other peers.

The demand for incorporating innovative and creative ways of learning has diversified teaching and learning of English from conventional methods to innovative ways such as Computer assisted language learning (CALL). CALL focuses in computer utilization to enhance language learning (Hartoyo, 2010). As a result teachers cease being the source of knowledge in the classroom as learners work in collaboration with other learning groups. Using CALL improves efficiency and effectiveness of learning by understanding and mastery of the language studied. CALL is able to generate interaction and improve communicative competence, including providing authentic material to the class or individual learning. Egbert, Akasha, Huff and Lee (2011: 12) asserted that "Computers, mobile devices and all forms of new technology can be used for language learning, but the essential component to make them effective is a creative, innovative, and forward-looking teacher who can match the needs of students with the capabilities of evolving technology to result in learning."

Bingimlas (2009) observed that teachers had a strong desire for the integration of ICT into education but lack of access to resources was a barrier. In support, Adetimirin (2011) posits that using such resources depends highly on availability and accessibility. Mingaine (2013) reported that implementation of ICT in schools in developing countries remains very limited despite a decade of considerable large investments in the technology. Kenya too has been affected in implementation of ICT in schools as she struggles with poverty. However, there is need for provision of affordable infrastructure to facilitate access to technological tools, based on guiding principles of the national ICT policy for Kenya (2006). In Kenya education system electronic-learning (e- learning) has been incorporated in higher institutions of learning. On the other hand, some primary schools have access to technological tools with the provision of tablets by the government. However, the government's efforts towards improving access to ICT by providing one mobile digital laboratory for use by secondary schools per constituency has not been realized.

Weblogs and English language teaching

A weblog, or blog, is an authentic innovation of the Internet providing students with a learner centred environment. Blogs refers to a simple webpage consisting of brief paragraphs of opinion, information, personal diary entries, or links, called posts, arranged chronologically with the most recent first, in the style of an online journal, and finally social networks. According to Pinkman (2005), blogging allows users with little or no computer background to create design and maintain blogs. Educational blogs in schools setups are utilized as creative tools that offer teachers immeasurable chances to develop pedagogical practices. In addition, blogs support reflective learning as learners can revisit experiences shared and use schema to learn new experiences. Stanley (2006) notes that

blogs open up classroom walls by showing the wider world what is happening, thus creating a small language learning community. There are three types of blogs according to Campbell (2003) that can be used in English language learning classrooms.

First, the tutor blog in which the teacher posts handouts and a syllabus or provides a website for the students ensuring daily reading practice for students. Students are allowed to make comments on the tutors or other learner's blogs. Blogs provide the necessary opportunity for shared process as they serve as a platform to start discussions, initiate reading interactively and facilitate reading activities. On the other hand, blogs besides improving writing, reading skills and vocabulary, they contribute to learning motivation and opportunities for authorship and readership. Blogs have been associated with reading and exploited for this skill to the extent that some texts books have passages from online blogs as an authentic source (Anderson, 2010).

Secondly, is the learner blog which serves for the improvement of reading and writing skills of the students when students update their blogs when expressing personal experiences and interests. Stanley (2006) suggests that students have a better understanding about the value of their writing as a real audience and a real purpose to write is established. Besides, they improve reading and writing skills by reading and making comments on peer's posts. In addition, writing may not be necessarily restricted to a topic. Strampel (2007) reported that learners perceived blogs offered them the ability to evaluate their own learning and to reflect on their thinking. Furthermore, critical thinking is paramount for they are aware that was is created is for a wider audience. On the other hand, Blogs offer many new chances for students to practice and improve their writing skills and make this process more manageable for both teachers and students (Arslan, 2014)

The third category which is the class blog involves collaborative work between the teacher and student thus creating a sense of a class community. This blog serves as an extra work after classroom interaction, motivating students to do further research and to write more in depth about the topics mentioned in class. When students publish their ideas and communicate with other learners online; a collaborative learning environment is created where language learners are invited to give feedback on each others' posts or complete tasks together. Webb (2009) found that an online language exchange program conducted through blogging between students in the UK and Spain helped the students to develop Spanish and English skills, respectively thus fostering second language development.

On the other hand, Zwalinski (2009) categorizes blogs according to content and presents four common types of blogs: classroom news blogs, mirror blogs, showcase blogs and literature response blogs. The literature response blogs motivates students to write about a text covered in class and reflects on it deeply as an assignment. Faramarzi (2013) observed that student's vocabulary and use of grammatical structures were more correct. It was observed that the students recommended a lot of different vocabulary to each other from the feedback from peers.

Podcasts and English language teaching

Podcast is learning by listening to audio or video files disseminated on the internet. Using foreign languages video clips that combine text, image, and music as learning materials stimulate students' emotional and cognitive areas in the process of learning. Moreover, Cross (2014) asserts that podcasts improves language beyond constraints of classrooms as up to-date, wide and extensive source of audio and video can be accessed by students. Furthermore, learning with video clips creates interest to the target language because student expresses emotions, imagination, experiences and knowledge. Therefore, meaningful learning tasks for listening and speaking skills can be viewed from a podcast from a native speaker. On the other hand, Fernandez, Simo and Sallan (2009) revealed that podcasting was not a substitute for traditional learning system; however, it increased learners' motivation. In support, Kim and King (2011) reported that implementation of podcasting into the classroom was interesting and influential.

Podcasting enhances language teaching as it supports digital recordings to be easily posted to the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player or electronic portable devices such as MP3, or mobile phones, and then can be watched or listened to at any time or any place (Evans, 2008). Educational podcasting distributed by instructors on course website allow learners to review, listen to, and download them to their own personal digital devices. Such podcast lessons/ lectures provide flexibility since students can access and review the course lectures at their convenience, which in turn empowers them to practice the self-learning process (Beheler, 2007). Learners with access to technology can autonomously employ and exploit podcasts to build on their classroom learning whether at home, or on the move, which in turn helps them increase their exposure to the target language and culture, and improve their language skills. On the other hand, teachers can prepare materials for learning and avail them on podcast for students to use wherever they are (Lord, 2008). According to Huntsberger and Stavitsky (2007), podcasts can be used to supplement learning resources such as textbooks by helping students pay attention to their instructional material on the podcast content (Hawke, 2010). Moreover, Lee (2009) reported that teachers can go beyond the confines of course content as a wide range of authentic podcasts are available to cater for different learners ability and interests.

According to Ducate and Lomicka (2009),t podcasting could be implemented as a tool for enhancing learners' pronunciation. This is because podcasts offer rich input through authentic speech. On the other hand effective listening enhances learners of English as a second language to improve their understanding and learning materials. Since podcasts can be downloaded, students can review lecture notes for better understanding. This gives a provision to assist students with different abilities. Knight (2010) observed that podcasts were efficient for developing phonetics accuracy for phonetics exercises. Similarly, Lebron-Lozada (2012), observed that students improved in conversational abilities by producing fewer mistakes and better pronunciation and more fluent speech, when they produced their own podcast. Therefore teachers should integrate podcasting into teaching for learners to get embedded in the culture of the language. Moreover, podcasts provide students the opportunity to experience authentic forms of the language and get personal involvement to learn various skills of English language.

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura (1986). Constructivism contends that acquisition of knowledge occurs through active interaction between the individual and environment. Using Web technologies creates a social and interactive learning environment in which learners become producers of their own knowledge when they create and actively participate by reading other learning materials shared on educational platforms.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey as the focus was on gaining awareness and views of teachers in integrating Web technologies in teaching and learning of English in secondary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 36 teachers of English in Kisumu west Sub County. Data was collected using self administered questionnaires. The first section gathered general information of the teachers, while section two solicited information on ICT resources and also it consisted of a 4 -scale Likert items ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questions gathered views of the teacher's awareness and integration of Web technologies. The last section had open ended questions on how Web technologies could be implemented. A follow up semi-structured interview was conducted on 5 teachers for in-depth understanding on the usage of Web technologies in secondary schools. Quantitative data was analyzed and presented by frequencies and percentages in tables. Qualitative data from the interview was transcribed and coded using themes from research questions and reported verbatim.. Ethical measures undertaken included informed consent, clarification on the purpose and benefits of the study.

Discussion

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. This was done in line with the research questions. Findings are presented in tables and quotes from the interviewed respondents.

Respondent'sbBio data

The study engaged 36 teachers of which 21(58.3%) were female and 15(41.7%) male as illustrated in Table 1. All the teachers who participated in the study had been trained as professional teachers.

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents by teaching experience. The results revealed that 3 teachers (8.3%) had experience of 1-5 years, 9 teachers (25%) had experience of 6- 10 years, 10 teachers(27.7%) had teaching experience of 11-15 years and those with experience of 16 years and above were 14(39%).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

Gender	n	%
Female	21	58.3
Male	9	41.7
Total	36	100

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by experience in teaching

Teaching Exp. (years)	n	%
1-5	3	8.3
6-10	9	25.0
11-15	10	27.7
16 and above	14	39
Total	36	100

Table 3. Familiarity with Web 2.0 tools

Web tool	Yes	No	Somehow	Total
Blog	36.20%	13.85	50.05	100%
Podcasts/Video cast	64	8.3	27.7	100%

Awareness and integration of web technologies

The results revealed that 8(22.2%) schools had computers leaving out 28 (77.8%). This result is in line with literature that revealed that teachers were eager to integrate ICT but they lacked the resources. Furthermore only 4(11.1%) schools offered computer studies; however, this was not likely to be a challenge to accessing social networks since they were user friendly and can be accessed as long as one has an internet enabled phone, laptop or computer. The statistics in Table 3 reveal that majority of the teachers were aware of social networks, however, they did not use them in the classroom for the purpose of teaching.

The results in Table 4 reveal that 83% of the respondents agreed that social networks are useful in teaching while 69% agreed that social networks could improve in planning of lessons. Some used them for gathering information for teaching but did not refer the learners to those sites. One of the respondents said this on accessing Web 2.0 technologies:

> *I access social networks almost every day, and there is so much information I get. At one time i downloaded slides which I used for teaching etiquette in class.*

While another respondent on the use of mobile phone for M-Learning said:

> *It would be much easier if we had intranet connected in the school as these could be faster. At times the data bundles just get finished because of poor network.*

Table 4. Respondents level on integration of Web 2.0 technologies

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Social networks are useful in teaching	5.50%	11.50%	47.60%	36.10%	100%
Social networks can enable me plan my lessons	8.30%	22.20%	58.30%	11.10%	100%
Social networks arouses students interest in learning	2.70%	13.80%	50.00%	33.30%	100%
Social networks enable collaboration in learning	13.85%	22.20%	47.60%	22.20%	100%
Social networks can improve reading skills	5.50%	5.50%	66.60%	22.20%	100%
Social networks can improve writing skills	27.70%	36.10%	22.20%	11.10%	100%
Social networks can improve listening skills	11.10%	22.20%	52.70%	13.80%	100%
Social networks can develop vocabulary	5.50%	13.80%	b44.70%	36.15%	100%
Social networks can Improve my teaching competence	8.30%	13.80%	47.20%	30.50%	100%
I can adopt using social networks in class	11.10%	22.20%	47.60%	25.00%	100%
Social network can be accessed anywhere	25.50%	47.60%	25.50%	8.30%	100%

Moreover 77% revealed that social networks would make them be competent in teaching. In addition, 72% were willing to integrate technological tools in the classroom. On the other hand, the results support reviewed literature which states that integration of Web 2.0 technologies developed language skills. However, 63.3% of the respondents felt that writing skills can l not be improved by social networks. A respondent had strong remarks on writing skills:

> *Social networks has messed up writing skills especially spelling as people just write the way they feel without checking the spelling. Maybe if they know it will be examined, they will be more careful.*

While majority of the respondents (83%) felt that social networks would arouse interest in the students only 3% felt that it was possible to access them anywhere. This reveals that Kenya still needs to ensure that internet is available across the country. The respondents felt that integration of Web 2.0 technologies was most likely going to improve performance in English as most of the students would be enthusiastic in learning in a "digitalized" environment. One of the respondents reported:

> *It is a dotcom world, our children are moving first with technology and if we embrace it in the system... I feel that is a motivation.*

The results revealed that a gap had been created by the introduction of tablets in primary schools yet when the students transit to tertiary education, they are expected to access information on Web technologies. It was observed that it was necessary for secondary schools to integrate using web technologies for smooth transition as one responded asserted:

> *Our students are not allowed to have mobile phones in schools but we know they have them at home. Having them discussing on the platforms especially set books will give varied opinion from peers. I believe it sounds easier for them to discuss on social media rather than facing the teacher in the classroom.*

Lastly, the study revealed that in the event that schools do not have computers,the teacher can use his/her mobile phone especially when it comes to teaching listening skills as an expert who is a native speaker would give the correct pronunciation of words. M-Learning can also be projected on an interactive board for all the learners to view and discuss. The study also revealed that teachers could organize class sessions with schools that had resources and a technological resource centre to be constructed to serve several schools in a region just in the same way as the national libraries operate.

Conclusion

The findings from the study revealed that Web technologies when integrated in the curriculum would enhance teaching of English language. The study therefore concluded that Web 2.0 tools should be integrated in the curriculum as it aroused the interest of the learners besides making them active and collaborative in a social interactive learning environment. This will ensure that the learning is shifted from being teacher centred to learner centred. On the other hand learners becomes familiar with technologies which they are expected to use when they exit to tertiary institutions for further research. The study recommends that teachers to use mobile smart phones in cases where other resources like laptops and desktops are not available. The study also recommended that the government should make an effort of providing internet in all regions of the country and set up technological resource centres for accessing technological tools.

Acknowledgements

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