

**DEPLOYING COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL)
PROGRAMMES IN THE TEACHING OF USE OF ENGLISH AT THE FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI (FUTO)**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the state-of-affairs in the deployment of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programmes in the teaching of Use of English at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). This is in consideration of the potentials of using computer programmes in bridging the gap in language teaching and learning here, such as access to reliable models, authentic materials, overcoming the effect of a large class size, task-based approach to language teaching, proper motivation of learners, among other things. The study noted the limited computer knowledge on the part of teachers and students and, to some extent, limited access to the Internet and computers. The study also looked at some computer applications that could be useful in teaching some topics in Use of English in the University.*

KEYWORDS: Use of English course, computer mediated teaching, task-based teaching approach

INTRODUCTION

The Use of English course is designed by the planners of higher education in Nigeria to prepare university students to meet their communication and research needs both at school and in life after school. The course objectives over the years have been as encapsulated in this course description given by the then Co-ordinator of the Use of English programme at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Professor I. D. Nwoga in the 1973/74 session:

1. To equip the students with the awareness of the use of language within society, to develop in him an insight into the devices by which language operates in those various uses. Thus equipped, the student is expected to be a more enlightened citizen capable of extracting truth from the various distortions of distinguishing fact from opinion, of generally developing a better standard of discrimination and judgement.
2. To equip the student with the tools of effective communication so that in his own essay writing and public speaking, he will use appropriate and exact words, construct correct and meaningful sentences and organize his thoughts into effective paragraph units towards achieving the various purposes of communication.
3. To help the student towards efficient reading and listening habit in terms of acquiring the reading speeds for different types of written material and the adequate methods of extracting salient information and taking notes from lectures or books.
4. To develop in the student the habit of consistent usage of the agreed devices in the mechanics of writing – punctuation, footnoting, bibliographical listing, etc., supply him with the information on the resources available to his studies in the libraries of the university and elsewhere, and advise him on the most functional approach to research and the collection of information.

If there has been any modification to these objectives, it is in the direction of recognizing the impact of emerging technologies in language teaching and learning which has made a big impact in communication following the coming of multimedia computer and Internet about two decades ago. In the Conference of GSP Directors of Nigerian Universities held at the University of Ibadan in January, 2011, the need to incorporate ICT in the teaching of General Studies courses was emphasized [See Aborishade (2011), Olúbòdé-Sàwè (2011) and Alhassan (2011)]. Then the issue of realizing the ideals of the Use of English programme and the role of the new technologies in the realization of these goals has become a matter of present concern.

At the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, where this researcher is teaching Use of English, the course objectives stipulated in Nwoga's course description above still form the course content. Then, the problem which must be addressed is to determine the extent to which Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been utilized to realize the course objectives at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri. To realize the aims of every language programme, the pedagogical approach is paramount. Approach to language teaching and learning changes as scholars get new insights into the phenomenon of language acquisition. In the teaching of Use of English, it must be seen how these new insights are utilized to realize the course objectives. This is the focus of this study as it examines the teaching of Use of English at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

The objective of this study is, therefore, to determine the position of the teaching and learning of the Use of English at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, in terms of CALL application. It is also the aim of this study to determine if there are challenges that could hinder the utilization of CALL in the teaching of the course and to recommend some useful CALL programmes for the teaching and learning of the course in the University.

Theory

The theoretical basis for this study is that of Interactional Hypothesis propounded by Michael Long (1996). Interactional Hypothesis is a second language acquisition theory and it holds that the development of language proficiency is hinged on face-to-face interaction and theory. Language input increases when learners negotiate for meaning in interaction. Again, in the process of interaction, learners can pay attention to their output and focus on what should be the appropriate form in the target language and, thereby, learn new forms. Interactional Hypothesis is behind the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief survey of some existing literature gives more insight into CALL application in language teaching and learning. Warschauer (1996) traces the path through which computer-mediated approach to language learning has come to its present state where it is vital in realizing any language learning goal. The source identifies three phases of CALL which correspond with various pedagogical approaches evolving over the years. The first phase which subsisted between the 1950s and 1970s is the Behavioristic CALL based on the behaviorist theory of learning. The role of the computer then was that of tutor as it became a vehicle for delivering instructional material to the student in the repetition and drill practice. Afterwards came the Communicative CALL between the 1970s and 1980s. This phase corresponds with the

communicative approach to language learning. The proponents of the Communicative approach reject the drill and practice of the behaviorist school because it does not expose learners enough to authentic communication from real life situations. Under this phase, in addition to the computer being a tutor, it is also a stimulus to stimulate students' discussion, writing or critical thinking. The computer is a tool as well, as in its use as word processors, spelling and grammar checkers, desk-top publishing programmes and concordancers. Then came Integrative CALL with the innovation made in multimedia computers and the Internet in the 1990s. Multimedia allows a variety of media, such as text, graphics, sound animation and video. One feature of the multimedia which made the greatest impact on communication is the hypermedia. Here, different multimedia resources are linked together and users can navigate from one to the other on a single computer.

Several authors have seen the crucial role computer-mediated communication (CMC) can play in language teaching/learning. Warschauer (1996) notes the use of the World Wide Web to search through millions of files within minutes and access authentic materials. Also learners can publish their own materials to share with others in every part of the world. According to Davies (2005), the multimedia makes it possible for the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening to be combined in a single activity. Again, asynchronous and synchronous communication between learners and teachers is made possible through the multimedia technology. Hamano-Bunce (2010) points out the importance of the social networking chatrooms as a motivator to learners. Also, the chatlogs can be a kind of corrective feedback where common learner problems with orthographical, syntactical, morphological accuracy were addressed. The chatlog can also serve to identify a learner's interlanguage. In her commentary on the sixth annual conference on Technology and Second Language Learning (TSSL), Chapelle (2010, p. 29) observed:

The presenters pointed out that technology expands what teachers and learners see as language materials because they can include a variety of individualized, social and classroom learning particularly through the combination of textbooks, workbooks, CD-ROMs, databases, and tools for linguistic analysis and communication.

On his part, Godwin-Jones (2010) suggests that teachers use on-line writing and gaming to motivate learners. Teachers should also integrate CALL programmes with other existing tools and services. They should show students "where to find and how to use available on-line writing and proofing tools, such as auto-glosses, on-line dictionaries, and browser-based spell checkers" (p. 5).

It has been noted that the interest of students on the computer world-wide is mainly in social networking activities, such as use of Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs, chatrooms, etc. According to Godwin-Jones (2010), social networking accounts for a good amount of writing being done by the current generation of students and this kind of writing has little to do with their studies. The source also noted the characteristics of the short messages used in the social networks. They are "short, de-contextualized messages using informal language dealing with topics of everyday life like relationships, current interests, up-coming plans, etc." (p. 2). This trend was condemned.

Reading is also affected by the new technologies. Godwin-Jones (2010) holds the view that more reading is now done on the electronic format than on paper, especially as newspapers, magazines, etc. prefer publishing on-line. There are the new compendia of information, such

as, Wikipedia. However, for the youths, most reading done on electronic devices is likely a by-product of participation in social networking, especially Facebook which he observed to have a tremendous influence on the lives of many young people in Western countries.

To redirect students to CALL programmes Godwin-Jones further writes: “Part of the reality of computer-aided language instruction today is the challenge of connecting with students used to using computer technology in ways significantly different from traditional CALL approaches”. The solution he proffers for this is “the use of ‘bridging activities’ to connect in-course tasks to the experiences of students in their (real) on-line lives” (p.7). The advantage is that it will engage their interest and ensure a continued use after the course is over.

The review so far has highlighted the importance of using the computer in language teaching and learning. Therefore, it is imperative to deploy the computer in teaching the Use of English course in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, to overcome some of the challenges encountered there.

METHODOLOGY

The procedure adopted in this research was a combination of the qualitative and the quantitative. To obtain data, the following methods were used: questionnaires, interviews, observation and direct experience. 100 questionnaires were administered to a group of first year students after a Use of English class. The group was randomly selected in a class of about 300. The respondents returned the questionnaire fully. Also another kind of questionnaire was issued to the lecturers of the course. Ten lecturers out of seventeen returned theirs. Descriptive details were used to analyse the two sets of questionnaires. The researcher also interviewed one person in each of the four centres which are concerned with ICT matters in the University. In terms of observation, the researcher is an insider and has been teaching the course in the University since 2004.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented and discussed under the following headings: the current position, the challenges, and prospects.

The Current Position

In this section, a number of factors which are related to the application of computer assisted language learning will be discussed. These are the course duration and content, the class size, the teaching method and the ICT related infrastructure presently on the ground. A discussion of findings in these areas will help to determine the way forward in the adoption of computer-mediated programmes in Use of English teaching.

- (a) The course duration and content: The course content of GST 101-Use of English I and GST 102--Use of English II are presented as Appendix (i). The course is taught two hours a week in the first and second semesters at the 100 level. The actual period of teaching in each semester is between 9 and 11 weeks. The rest of the time is taken up by arrival of students at the beginning of the semester, revision, examination and, sometimes, public holiday. When the duration is matched with the ambitious course content, the time available for teaching is grossly inadequate.

- (b) **The Class Size:** The average teacher has about 220 students in his class. However, sometimes two or three teachers merge their classes and teach in one lecture hall because of lack of space to separate them. This becomes a heavily crowded class. This is compounded by inadequacy of seats with the result that many stand throughout the duration of the class. Sometimes the noise makes it difficult for the ones at the back to hear the lecturer.
- (c) **The Teaching Method:** The teaching method adopted in the teaching of the course by virtually all the lecturers is the teacher-dominated, instructor method. The teacher stays in front of the class doling out the lesson. Sometimes it could be the reading of lecture notes for students to copy. However, from the response obtained from the questionnaire, some lecturers hold interactive sessions and give tasks to the students. Where this happens, it is marginal because of the time available and the sitting arrangement. Some of the tasks teachers admitted they give students include essay and term paper writing, Internet search, reading exercise, summary writing, and oral presentation. By and large, the class size and sitting arrangement limit whatever interaction and tasks students are given. None of the lecturers who responded uses games to teach.
- (c) **ICT Infrastructure:** There are four centres in the University which can offer opportunity to students to have access to computer and Internet. These centres are the University Computer Centre (UCC), the ICT Centre, the ICT section of FUTO Library, and Afrihub Nigeria Limited. The first three are owned by the University while the last (Afrihub Nigeria Limited) is a privately owned commercial venture. From the interviews of key staff members in these centres, the researcher got the following information: UCC has about 40 Internet-connected computers but access to the centre is restricted. Teachers who have computer components in their course content can come on special arrangement to use their facilities. Lecturers can use their computers on special request. Courses are organized for lecturers for specific purposes. However, there is fluctuation in Internet services. The FUTO Library has 13 computers with Internet link in its cybercafé where students can browse at the rate of ₦100.00 (one hundred naira) per hour. Students can bring their laptops and get connected at no charge. Also the centre can assist a student to search specific information which is part of the centre's regular library duty. The ICT Centre is the most restricted area and its staff members were quite evasive in giving information. The centre does not serve students. However, it assists lecturers by giving them password to do free Internet browsing within a certain radius on campus. Such lecturers use their personal laptops. Afrihub Nigeria limited has the largest facility to accommodate a large number of students. The ICT Co-ordinator claimed the centre has 300 PCs connected to the Internet. However, it is a private business and users pay for their services. There is a special arrangement that a certain amount of money be paid along with the school fees for students who want to use their facilities. A lecturer who wants to have a class there using their facilities will have to apply to the Director. Definitely, one cannot be holding a regular class there using their facilities to demonstrate.

The Challenges

The challenges identified in the implementation of a computer assisted language learning programme in the teaching and learning of Use of English in FUTO include the level of computer literacy, Internet access and bandwidth, ownership of personal computers, availability of suitable software, and inadequate teaching time.

- (a) **The Level of Computer Literacy:** The study has identified low level of computer literacy as one of the factors that can hamper the implementation of CALL in Use of English teaching. The majority of the lecturers are barely computer literate, being able to use the Microsoft Word marginally and, maybe, browse. Aborisade (2011) and Olúbòdé-Sàwè (2011) also identified the same problem among lecturers of the Federal University of Technology, Akure. Among the students too there are some who have no idea of the computer although on the average students know about computers more than lecturers. Figure 1 below indicates the computer literacy of FUTO students.

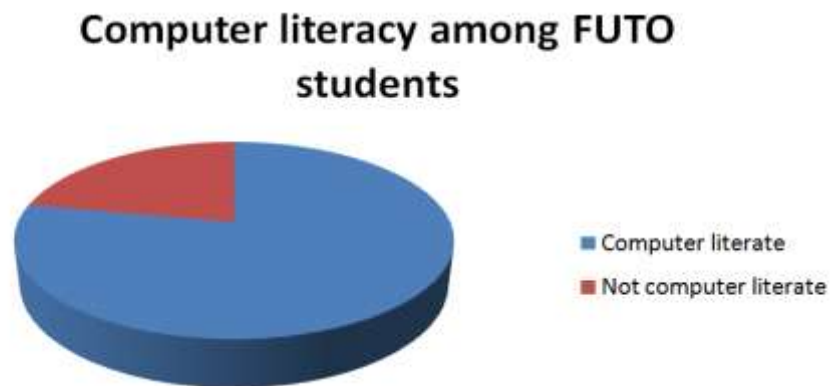


Fig.1. Computer literacy among FUTO students

In spite of the seemingly high level of computer literacy among FUTO students given the 78% computer literacy as against 22% computer illiteracy level, most of the ones who acknowledge that they are literate have bare knowledge of the computer. They mostly know how to browse on the Internet and are not conversant with the other computer programmes. Here is a breakdown of their knowledge of the various programmes.

Table 1. Number of students who can use each computer programme.

S/N	COMPUTER PROGRAMME	NO. OF STUDENTS
1.	MS Word	47
2.	Power Point	24
3.	Excel	27
4.	Internet Browsing	68

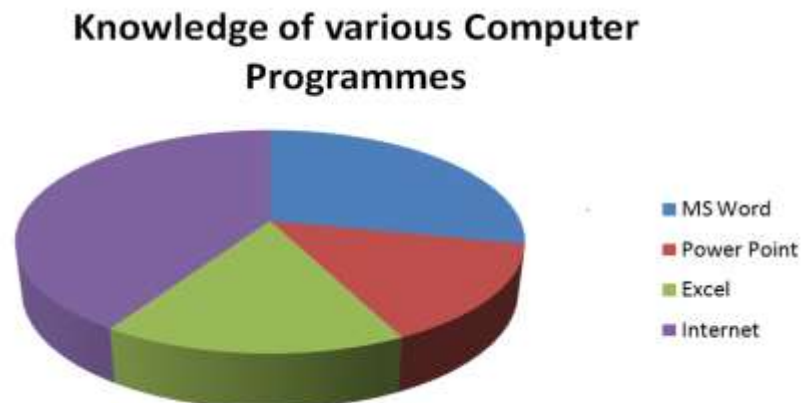


Figure 2. Distribution of students who can use the various computer programmes.

- (b) Internet Access and bandwidth: As revealed earlier, Internet connectivity fluctuates on campus in all the places that offer Internet services. With this, no meaningful CALL programme in the class could work effectively. Again, students cannot easily afford the cost of using Internet on a sustainable basis.
- (c) Ownership of Personal Computers: Ownership of personal computers among students is another impediment. Of the 100 student respondents, 26 have computers, 72 do not have computers, and two persons did not respond to the question.

Computer ownership by students

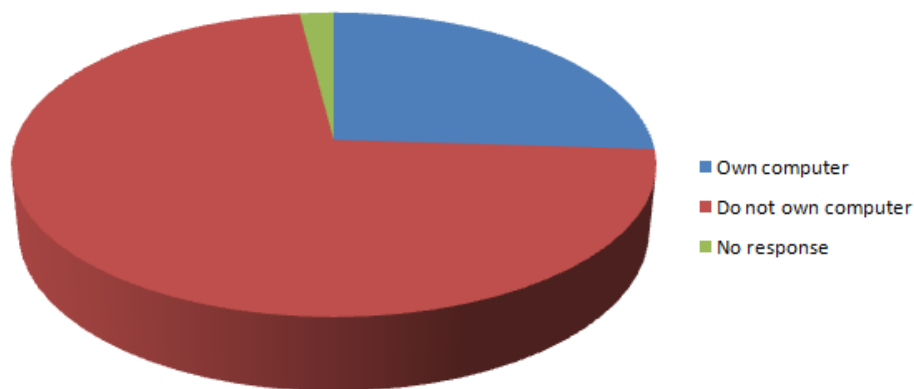


Fig 3. Computer ownership by students

- (d) Availability of Suitable language learning Software: No software tailored to address the objectives of the Use of English programme is available, but is highly desirable. Such a software should focus on the objectives of the course, as well as the socio-cultural issues peculiar to our context.
- (e) Inadequate Teaching Time: As noted earlier, there is inadequate time in the time-table to incorporate rich CALL programmes. Time table planners in the University should consider extending the course to the second year.
- (f) Poor Funding: Poor funding is a very big obstacle to CALL. The designing of appropriate programmes and provision of necessary facilities are needed for effective CALL take off in FUTO. The little effort seen here is a recent development of about seven years ago with a management that was committed to developing ICT in FUTO. Yet the effort is grossly inadequate.

PROSPECTS

In spite of the numerous challenges that make the adoption of CALL programmes impossible in FUTO, there seems to be a lot of prospects for the use of the programmes here. The first is the fact that the University has four computer centres and some are available to the students. If these are properly harnessed and funded, it would make the realization of CALL quicker than thought. Again, from the responses by lecturers and students, both are willing to have a highly functional knowledge of the computer and are also ready to adopt CALL in Use of English.

Another thing that seems to work favorably for CALL use in teaching in the University is that there is a great need for it. There is scarcity of authentic materials to make teaching more relevant to the needs of the students, and when the students see how much CALL can bridge this gap they will be more committed. Lastly, CALL is a global trend of which Nigeria and FUTO cannot be left out. Already FUTA is blazing the trail in this direction [See Aborishade (2011) and Olúbòdé-Sàwè (2011)].

Possible Computer Programmes for Use of English Course in FUTO

There are numerous CALL programmes that can be used at various levels of education. The Wikipedia has a comprehensive list of such programmes that can be taken advantage of by any serious-minded second language teacher or even learner. These programmes can be adapted and modified to suit our socio-cultural environment. It only takes engaging a competent software designer.

For want of space, some of these computer-assisted language programmes and exercises are listed below:

Grammar: drills, games, grammar checkers, multiple choice exercises, gap-filling exercises, etc.

Listening: multi-skill drills and practice programmes.

Pronunciation: programmes that allow learners to record and play back their own voices and compare to a model.

Reading: reading programmes, games and text reconstruction exercises

Vocabulary: drill and practice programmes, multimedia tutorials, games, reference materials such as Concordancers (to give various contexts to illustrate use of an expression)

Writing: collaborative writing programmes, modules for real time writing interaction such as chatrooms, blogs, etc.

Reference materials: encyclopedias, dictionaries, concordances, Wikipedia, etc.

Internet: for researches, collaboration, access to authentic course materials, etc.

Website: A Use of English website can be deployed to manage the course programmes on Web. The Wiki programme and Web 2.0 make interaction between learners and teachers easy and for easy access to course materials, submission and grading of assignments, progress reports, etc.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to look at the application of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programmes in the teaching and learning of Use of English course at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri. The CALL application in the teaching of Use of English in the University is yet to take place. There are challenges that will inhibit its realization such as poor knowledge of the computer by teachers and students, lack of access to computers and Internet, inadequate time on the time table, fluctuating Internet connectivity, etc. However, the

positive factors that can be built on include the existence of four computer centres on campus, a zeal to adopt CALL programmes, a certain level of computer literacy on the part of teachers and students. There are suitable computer-mediated programmes that can be adopted for all the aspects of the Use of English course taught in the University. If CALL programmes are effectively used the ideals of the Use of English programme will be realized.

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APPENDIX (I): THE COURSE OUTLINE OF USE OF ENGLISH

GST 101- Use of English I

1. Introduction: Historical background of English in Nigeria, functions of English in Nigeria, enhancing proficiency in English and why Use of English?
2. Study Skills: Time management, use of the library, note taking, and use of the dictionary
3. Listening Skills: What is listening, types of listening, factors that affect listening efficiency, and how to cultivate good listening ability.
4. Reading Skills: Reading defined, why we must read, reading faults, good reading habits, reading speed, reading techniques (skimming, scanning, SQ3R), intensive and extensive reading, levels of reading (reading for main ideas, reading for details, reading for links, reading critically and reading creatively)
5. Vocabulary Development: Meaning of vocabulary, word-formation processes, affixes, lexical relation (synonym, antonym, homonym, hyponym etc.), connotation and denotation, collocations and idioms, and figures of speech
6. Outlining and Summary Writing: What is an outline?, uses of an outline, how to draw an outline, summary defined, importance of summary, essentials of summary writing, and summary writing format
7. Oral Communication Skills: Organs of speech, speech sounds, simple phonemic transcription, stress and intonation
8. Literary Appreciation: Literary genres and their features, elements of a literary work: theme, plot, characterization, setting, point of view, etc.

GST 102—Use of English II

1. Grammar: Introduction, word classes and functions, tenses, phrases and clauses, elements of sentences (Subject, Verb, Object and Complement), sentence types (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamation), sentence agreement (concord), voice (active and passive), direct and indirect speeches, mechanics (punctuation and spelling guide).
2. Paragraph Development: What is paragraph?, types of paragraph, structure of paragraph, introductory and concluding paragraphs, topic sentence, linking devices, qualities of a good paragraph
3. Essay Writing: Types of writing (descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative), stages of writing: pre-writing (planning, choosing/framing topic, articulating a thesis statement, gathering/sorting ideas/information, outlining), writing (choice of words, tone, style, paragraph and cohesion, structure, introduction, development and conclusion), re-writing: review, checklist: punctuation, spelling, tenses, etc.
4. Letter Writing: Types, format, letters of application and curriculum vitae
5. Report Writing: Types of report, features of a report, term paper, documentation and referencing

APPENDIX (II): QUESTIONNAIRE ON KNOWLEDGE OF COMPUTER BY FUTO STUDENTS

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI

DIRECTORATE OF GENERAL STUDIES

SURVEY ON STUDENTS' USE OF COMPUTER

Section A: Demographic Particulars of Respondent

Department/Year of Study.....

Sex of respondent (tick ✓): Male Female.....

Age of respondent (tick ✓): 16-20 yrs..... 21-25 yrs.....

26-30 yrs..... 31 and above.....

Type of secondary school attended (tick ✓): (i) Government owned..... (ii) Privately owned.....

Rate your secondary school (tick ✓): (i) Very high standard (ii) Fairly high standard..... (iii) Average standard..... (iv) Poor standard.....

Section B: Respondent's Knowledge of Computer

(please tick ✓ where necessary):

1. Do you know how to use the computer? Yes ☐ No ☐

2. If yes, where did you learn it?

Primary school ☐ secondary school ☐ university ☐ home ☐

3. Do you own a computer? Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Which ones do you own? Laptop ☐ desktop ☐ others ☐

5. Tick the aspects of computer programmes you can use effectively:

Microsoft Word ☐ Power Point ☐ Excel ☐ Internet ☐

6. If the Internet services are to be used in teaching you and giving you assignments to download and submit, would you like it? Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Can you effectively download materials from internet and upload assignments?

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. Indicate which of the following social networks you subscribe to:

Facebook ☐ Tweeter ☐ My Space ☐ Skype ☐ Email ☐

Others ☐

**APPENDIX (III): QUESTIONNAIRE ON APPLICATION OF ICT IN TEACHING
USE OF ENGLISH IN FUTO**

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI

DIRECTORATE OF GENERAL STUDIES

SURVEY ON THE APPLICATION OF ICT IN THE TEACHING OF USE OF ENGLISH

This questionnaire is intended to determine the extent of application of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching of Use of English in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). Please your cooperation is needed to obtain authentic information.

1. What is your highest qualification?
2. How many years have you taught Use of English at FUTO?.....
3. How many students did you teach in your Use of English class in the previous semester?.....
4. How often do you hold interactive sessions in your Use of English classes?.....
5. If not, why?.....
.....
6. How often do you give students tasks to perform individually or in groups in your class?
.....
7. If you do, list some of the tasks you have been giving your students.....
.....
8. If not, why have you not been giving tasks to students?
.....
.....
9. How often do you employ games in your teaching?
.....
10. If you do, list some of the games you employ in your teaching
.....
.....

11. What is your level of knowledge of the computer?

.....
.....

12. List some of the computer applications you can use effectively (e.g. Microsoft Word, Power point, Excel, Corel Draw, Internet, etc.).....

.....
.....

13. How much access to Internet do you have and why?

14. How efficient are you in Internet use?.....

15. Based on your present knowledge of the computer, can you upload material for students on web if a

website is developed for Use of English ?.....

16. List the web-based social networks you have been operating successfully (e.g. email, Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Skype, You tube, etc.).

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.....

17. List the computer-mediated activities you have been applying in your teaching, including Internet search.

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18. How do you see the idea of using computer-mediated activities in the teaching of Use of English?

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.....

19. Do you foresee any impediment in the realization of the goal stated in 18 above?

.....

20. If your answer in 19 is 'yes', give reasons

.....