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Perception of the effectiveness of ICT-ELT integration during the COVID-19 pandemic in English Language Classes in Ghana

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Abstract

The transition from face-to-face to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked the need to integrate robust and dependable Information and Communication Technology in teaching and learning. Furthermore, in recent years, ICT has emerged as the most significant instrument in the educational context. Despite the transition, only 10% of instructors in Ghana recognises the usefulness of ICT integration in teaching during and even post pandemic. It is based on these findings that this study sought to investigate instructors' perception in ICT-ELT integration. The empirical data were gathered using a descriptive and quantitative study approach, using an online questionnaire distributed to 100 primary and secondary school teachers. The findings demonstrated that the majority of English instructors had a favorable opinion of incorporating ICT owing to its efficacy. The relevance of stakeholders and government's assistance in fostering ICT-based teaching and learning was highlighted as quite critical in providing technical support for English instructors.

Keywords: COVID-19, EFL, ICT-ELT integration, learners, teachers' perceptions



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Public Interest Statement

The transition from face-to-face to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked the need to integrate robust and dependable Information and Communication Technology in teaching and learning. This study aims to investigate how teachers perceive ICT-ELT integration in learning.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating influence on human life, behaviour and most so education sector. Face-to-face teaching and learning activities have been converted to blended or online instruction, which is entirely or partially covered by technology. ICT has therefore become the most important instrument in educational setting, particularly in ELT. It expands educational opportunities by allowing teaching and learning to occur at any time and in any location (Fu, 2013). With the use of ICT, teachers and students are able to engage in an interactive online classes during the pandemic. As a result, combining ICT with ELT is critical.

Some researchers have undertaken various studies (Baytak, 2011), realizing the potential of ICT (Aydin, 2019). The findings of their research confirm that ICT provides language learners with limitless learning tools and materials, an engaging learning environment, and realistic content. ICT also alters how people access, organize and gain knowledge and information (Bandura, 2012). It has also enabled language learners to interact with a variety of individuals, languages, cultures, and social customs (Smith, 2016). As a result, information and communication technology (ICT) plays an important role in increasing educational and pedagogical results and the quality of English teaching and learning.

On the other hand, it has been reported that teachers face additional obstacles as a result of the incorporation of ICT in ELT. They are required to enhance their pupils' technical literacy to prepare them for ease in their studies in the cutting-edge technology. To do so, students need basic and appropriate skills in ICT. The impression of ICT's usefulness is one of the elements that influences teachers' usage of ICT. It corresponds to certain recent investigations conducted by earlier researchers (Kim, 2013; Bhasin, 2020). According to the researchers, teachers' evaluations of ICT efficacy and utility are key determinants in their intentions to utilize ICT in their classroom practice. Those who have a favourable impression of ICT are more likely to employ it in their teaching practice than those who are yet to.

Furthermore, there have been limited studies in Ghana on how English instructors perceived the effectiveness of incorporating ICT into their classroom instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The barriers that hinder individuals from using ICT during the pandemic should be examined so that the government may provide solutions to successfully implement online instruction across all schools. As a result, the authors are motivated to investigate the effectiveness of ICT during this pandemic, as well as the factors that prohibit adoption of ICT in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, as prompted by the following questions:

1. What are the views of EFL instructors on the efficacy of ICT-ELT integration during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the barriers to using ICT-ELT during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. Literature Review

In today's teaching and learning, the application of technology is unavoidable since the outbreak of COVID-19. The continuation of learning activities has largely depended on the application of technology by both teachers and students. As such, there have been several adjustments and shifting of materials that were supposed to be delivered in classrooms physically to fit the online learning. Online teaching materials are applied in different forms such as projects, documents, videos, and several other formats. According to Agung and Surtikanti (2020), online learning is hindered by various factors such as inadequate devices and poor internet connectivity. Similarly, the study by Atmojo and Arif (2020) discovered that online learning found most teachers unprepared. It is clear that both teachers and students face difficulties in the application of technology in learning.

Although the application of technology in teaching has been the wish for many world education systems for sometime now, the outbreak of COVID-19 has triggered the sudden shift to online learning. Lestinawati and Widyantoro (2020) reveals that students and teachers face difficulties because of limited technology and inadequate information technology skills. But because of the ongoing home-schooling due to the pandemic, online learning has been a preferred alternative.

Further to the above, it is believed that technology has really helped language learning. According to Moura and Carvalho, 2013, technology has supported verbal skills, listening skills, and speaking skills. These advantages are possible due to the English learning features such as multimedia interfaces that are crucial in language learning. Numerous studies have also revealed that technology improves the quality of learning. The study by Steele et al. (2019) revealed that technology could enhance learners' creative and cognitive skills. This is evident by the application of gamification tools in classrooms by teachers to enhance learning. The application of Menti and other gamification tools have made the learning process quite interesting. In addition to the above, many children of the current generation are digital natives. They were born during the technological era, thereby made quick adaptations to technology. Hence, even though the pandemic has resulted in the closure of face-to-face learning, they can shift and adjust quickly to technological integration while at home. According to Genota (2018) and Swanzen (2018), learners always prefer to learn online and gain information. It is claimed that technology teaching has resulted in the shift of the learning process from teacher-centric to student-centred.

Despite the above, there are critics of the use of technology in learning, claiming that the traditional method of learning is better than virtual learning. A study conducted in Indonesia by (Rachmawati 2016) indicated a negative experience for the application of technology in teaching, even though numerous research on the application of technology in the classroom has revealed positive experiences (Yudhiantara & Saehu, 2017; Yudhiantara & Nasir, 2017).

Designing mobile apps for english vocabulary learning

A study conducted by Wang Bor-Tying (2017) examined how mobile applications developed with English and Chinese descriptions helped learners improve English vocabulary. The results of his study indicated that learners were capable of learning deeply in the real context, and also, the technique improved the student's motivation as compared to learning using textbooks. The authors concluded that the application of a mobile app promotes a learner-centred teaching technique whereby the students collaborate to share ideas and discuss with their colleagues. The technique helped learners improve their vocabulary acquisition and enhance their tactics of self-learning.

Perception of the Usage of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning

A study conducted by Wan Ummu Aim and Maslawati Mohamad (2018) investigated the perception of the application of MALL in English as a Second Language among college learners. The results revealed that the majority of the participants supported the idea that the application of MALL really helped them complete their tasks. The majority of them indicated that the app was easy to use. The authors concluded that the application of MALL offered several activities for the learners to explore and also motivated them to interact with colleagues and instructors using the desired language.

Online Learning during the Coronavirus Pandemic

The impact of COVID-19 on education has been the subject talk in the recent past. A study conducted by (Mahmud 2018) to investigate the perception of students concerning online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that learners exhibited a positive attitude towards virtual learning because of its usefulness during the pandemic. A study by (Christensen 2020) involving learners from different parts of the world revealed that the pandemic greatly affected learning institutions, especially in education delivery. Most institutions opted to adopt online learning as an alternative teaching method. This technique was faced with a lot of challenges, such as inadequate facilities for delivering online learning in various institutions. Although some schools had been using technology as an additional teaching method even before the pandemic outbreak, it is clear that most of the schools are still not ready for full-time online learning. Thereby, appropriate application of the technology learning process is necessary for effective continuation of learning during the pandemic. This application should put into consideration the interaction of students and teachers and the language used for communication by students and teachers (Mullamaa, 2020). Additionally, Christensen, 2014, in his study on the experience of learners during online learning, revealed that students believe that their instructors should know how to shift their instruction given the techniques to the online environment. (Christensen, 2014).

3. Methodology

A descriptive quantitative research design was used in this study. Due to the pandemic, the information was gathered by sending an online questionnaire to English instructors in both primary and secondary schools using Google Form.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were English instructors from both primary and secondary schools. Of all the participants, 100 of them were able to finish the survey. The participants varied in age from 21 to 57 years old, with an average of 10 years of experience in teaching English. Meanwhile, it was discovered that their ICT experience for teaching-related objectives ranged from 1 to 10 years. In addition, their ICT proficiency were moderate.

3.2 Research Instrument

Two questionnaires from various sources as the tool to collect data from the participants were used based on the nature of the study. The first questionnaire was adapted and modified from (Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2010). It was used to determine how effective ICT integration was for EFL instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second questionnaire was developed and modified to determine what factors hindered instructors from utilizing ICT (Salehi & Salehi, 2012). Because the authors were required to adjust the language to fit the statement within

the context of the current study, these surveys were modified. They were intended to be closed-ended questions in which participants may choose the best choice for their current situation. The authors employed a four-point Likert scale in all questions, with responses ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Agree, and (4) Strongly Agree.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Researchers frequently conduct an online survey in this circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the authors used an online survey to collect data from the respondents in this study. They were requested to complete the survey using a Google form that they were provided with. They had to complete 24 questions as in the questionnaire. It took around 10-15 minutes to complete. Finally, SPSS was used to evaluate their responses, which included frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation to indicate the data's frequency.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings were divided into two sections: English teachers' assessments of ICT's usefulness during the COVID-19 pandemic and reasons inhibiting English instructors from incorporating ICT. The following is a list of them:

4.1 Teachers' Perceived the Effectiveness of ICT during COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 1. EFL teachers' perception of ICT-ELT integration

No	Statement	S.A	A	D	S.D	Mean	S t d . Deviation
1	The use of ICT in language instruction is critical, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic	85%	15%	-	-	3.85	.335
2	Learning is more pleasurable when ICT is used during the pandemic.	58%	39%	3%	-	3.49	.628
3	Using ICT during a pandemic makes learning more effective and convenient.	49%	38%	13%	-	3.41	.648

4	Using ICT during a pandemic increases my teaching by providing me with more up-to-date resources.	55%	43%	2%	-	3.38	.539
5	Using ICT during a pandemic increases the quality and effectiveness of my teaching.	33%	58%	9%	-	3.24	.546
6	Using ICT during a pandemic has allowed me to construct a variety of learning activities.	39%	52%	6%	3%	3.29	.579
7	ICT use during a pandemic helps me expand various learning resources.	61%	35%	4%	-	3.53	.519
8	Using ICT during a pandemic allows me to quickly produce instructional materials.	29%	66%	5%	-	3.25	.533
9	Using ICT during a pandemic helps my learners better absorb the topics.	18%	73%	7%	2%	3.08	.649

10	Using ICT during a pandemic enables students to be more engaged and involved in the situation.	15%	68%	10%	7%	2.95	.618
11	Using ICT throughout the pandemic makes it easier to measure students' progress.	11%	75%	13%	1%		
12	Using ICT during a pandemic boosts students' interest and enthusiasm in learning English.	12%	76%	10%	2%	2.95	.588

According to Table 1, most EFL instructors (85%) strongly believed that incorporating ICT into ELT is critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the majority of instructors thought that using ICT during a pandemic made learning more interesting. According to the figures on the table, more than 80% of English instructors agreed or strongly agreed with each item in the questionnaire. They realized the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) during the pandemic. It suggested that they had a good impression of ICT's usefulness during the pandemic.

Overall, the results show that English instructors thought ICT-ELT integration was beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic. This positive attitude stems from their personal experiences with the effects, advantages, and efficacy of adopting ICT in their classrooms throughout the pandemic. For example, during this pandemic, they may make teaching and learning activities more effective, simpler, and pleasant. It exists because ICT allows individuals to access a wide range of learning resources and activities. As a result, they may simply develop their contents with the use of ICT, resulting in their pupils comprehending them more effectively. This conclusion is backed by a previous study (Dashtestani, 2012), which claimed that implementing ICT makes the classroom more fascinating since it makes learning process more appealing.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that ICT allows teachers to measure and track their pupils' progress in learning English during the pandemic. This appears to be the case since ICT provides valuable software or programs for teachers to examine their students' assignments, saving time and energy over manually checking them one by one. Previous

research has found that using ICT can make it simpler for instructors to analyze and monitor their students' development than ever before (Mahmud, 2018).

In addition, incorporating ICT into ELT during this pandemic allows instructors and students to engage more efficiently. Both teachers and students can interact efficiently using the numerous supported tools or platforms available during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Zoom, Google-meet, Google-classroom, WhatsApp, and other platforms). Teachers, for example, can use WhatsApp groups to communicate with their pupils. Even though they won't be able to meet in person during the epidemic, it will be possible to communicate online through those platforms. It demonstrates that using ICT during may provide a virtual English lesson for both professors and students. This conclusion is in line with (Castro 2011), who claims that ICT tools has influenced a successful student-teacher interaction and communication. Therefore, the use of ICT makes it easier for teachers and EFL students to get rich information, knowledge, and other supplementary learning materials through a variety of websites. This will provide them with other options for using the potential of ICT to boost their learning. They will be more motivated to study English since they will be able to get the information they want on the internet hence becoming more responsible learners during this pandemic. ICT has also been shown to boost students' motivation and engagement in studying in previous research (Mullamaa, 2010). This study is consistent with the findings of (Bolandifar 2015; Rodliyah 2018), who discovered that ICT usage can improve students' motivation to learn.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research (Fu, 2013; Dashtestani, 2012; Bolandifar, 2015, and Rodliyah, 2018), which found that the efficacy of ICT encouraged instructors to utilize it as a tool to enhance their teaching practice. They all believe that using ICT in ELT has a significant influence on their teaching. During this COVID-19 pandemic, English teaching and learning may take place everywhere and at any time because of technology.

3.2 Factors discouraging EFL teachers from integrating ICT

The study's second question is to determine what obstacles prevent English instructors from using ICT in their classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following table shows the results:

Table 2. Factors discouraging EFL teachers from integrating ICT

No	Statement	S.A	A	D	S.D	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Little internet access prevents me from using ICT.	58%	35%	7%	-	3.47	.625

2	I am discouraged from utilizing ICT in the classroom due to a lack of technical assistance at school.	37%	48%	11%	4%	3.17	.733
3	Because of my colleagues' negative attitudes about ICT, I am unable to use it in class.	12%	37%	44%	7%	2.52	.786
4	I am unable to use ICT because of the time required to study and prepare it.	18%	63%	15%	4%	2.92	.683
5	I am hesitant to use ICT because of a lack of expertise and training in the field.	23%	59%	15%	3%	3.01	.697
6	I seldom utilize ICT due to a lack of interest and desire.	13%	69%	16%	2%	2.91	.626
7	Lack of school support hinders me from using ICT.	12%	73%	12%	3%	2.92	.586

As shown in Table 2, many obstacles hindered English instructors from using ICT in their classrooms throughout the pandemic. Based on the mean score, inadequate internet connection

was the most intimidating reason for teachers to use ICT (M=3.47), followed by a lack of ICT technical assistance at schools (M=3.17) and a lack of ICT expertise and training (M= 3.01). Surprisingly, 44% of them believed that negative comments from classmates concerning ICT did not prevent them from using it in class. As a result of this finding, the government should examine the existing state of ICT-ELT integration in order to give alternative solutions to the challenges.

Teachers face new challenges while integrating ICT into ELT. The reality on the ground demonstrates that a positive attitude alone cannot ensure that ICT-ELT integration in the curriculum goes well. According to the findings, the majority of English teachers admit to having faced technological issues such as poor internet connections. It should be acknowledged that there are many regions in Ghana where the internet connection is unreliable. There's no assurance that the central city site will have a reliable internet connection. This is consistent with a recent study (Rodliyah, 2018) and (Fithri, 2014), which revealed that lack of internet access hinders instructors from using ICT in the classroom. The same issue exists not just in Ghana, but also in other nations. For example, Elik 2014, discovered that poor internet connection and infrastructure were the key impediments to adopting ICT-based learning in the Turkish setting.

English instructors were also hindered by a lack of ICT technical help from their schools. Schools' unwillingness to integrate ICT into their instruction is hindered by a lack of technical assistance. This conclusion is backed up by (Salehi), who claims that lack of technical assistance in school prevents pupils from using ICT in their classes. Furthermore, (Knezek 2002) emphasizes that teachers' capacity to work with technology is critical in deciding how well they use ICT. This is in line with the findings of this research, in which EFL instructors admit that lack of ICT understanding and training made it difficult for them to make good use of the technology's potential during the pandemic. Previous research (Aydin 2012; Salehi 2020) found the same results, indicating that instructors lack ICT abilities. As a result, they stressed the importance of having enough knowledge of ICT-ELT integration. Thus, in order to meet the targets established by Ghanaian curriculum developers, the government must equip English teachers with adequate ICT training, as teachers' professional development is a critical component of successful ICT-ELT integration (Fithri, 2014).

5. Conclusion

This study examined how EFL instructors in both primary and secondary schools viewed the effectiveness of ICT-ELT integration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrated that many instructors have good attitude about incorporating ICT in ELT, despite several barriers prohibiting them from doing so. It is impossible to deny the impact of ICT in English teaching and learning. English instructors should adapt to this pandemic situation by incorporating ICT into their teaching to prevent being left behind. Several factual recommendations about the study's findings should be emphasized. To begin with, it is clear that EFL teachers still require training in integrating various ICT technologies in order to improve their teaching in accordance with the curriculum's expectations. Each school should give technical assistance to instructors in order to assist them in overcoming their challenges in incorporating ICT. Finally, technological and instructional equipment in schools should encourage instructors' positive attitudes.

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