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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTEGRATING COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Today's classrooms are often equipped with computers, access to the internet and projectors that allow the role of teachers to move from a traditional one to that of facilitator in the classroom. Teaching no longer centres around the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student; learning comes from student inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving based on information accessed from a variety of sources. Increased demand is therefore being placed on educational institutions to use ICT to teach the skills and knowledge that students need for the 21st century. Historically the concept of information and communication technology integration as an approach evolved as a reaction to early computer-in-schools programmes where the emphasis lay on developing computer literacy or technical knowledge of computers and the use of various computer applications. More recently information and communication technology integration has been recognized as using computers to learn, rather than learning to use computers. Technology integration is a complex phenomenon that involves understanding teachers' motivations, perceptions, and beliefs about learning and technology.

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INTRODUCTION

The e-Education policy in South Africa highlights the importance of information and communication technology literacy and demanded that every school going learner be ICT-savvy by 2013. However, the policy does not present implementation strategies; the challenge is that most schools still lack technology equipment for teaching and learning, and teachers are not yet fully equipped with the knowledge and skills to integrate technology into the curriculum. Using qualitative case study design, this study explores the challenges facing and successes relating to technology education with respect to the conditions essential to a technology integration framework. The findings revealed the availability of infrastructure as well teachers who lack relevant computer technology knowledge and skills. The study recommends capacity building as of major priority. The increasing popularity and accessibility of the internet and internet-based technologies, along with the need for a diverse group of students to have alternative means to learn effectively, pose a formidable challenge for schools to teach and learn using technology. This challenge also applies to developing countries like South Africa. One of the policies in South Africa, "the e-Education policy", poses some remarkable challenges with regard to teaching and learning using technologies. The policy highlights the importance of information and communication technology literacy and therefore demanded that every learner in the General Education Training (GET) and Further Education Training (FET) bands be information and communication technology-savvy by 2013. However, the policy made a demand but it failed to arrive at the implementation strategies that will drive this demand. Despite the availability of the ICT policy in South Africa, it is assumed that the majority of educators in South African schools have not been sufficiently prepared during their college years to integrate technology into their teaching. Therefore, buying computers and software for schools and connecting them to the internet does not automatically imply effective uses for technology. Based on the current situation at school levels, many students lack sufficient information and communication technology knowledge to work on their own, to surf the web and to gain valuable information. The challenges to technology integration in teaching and learning in South Africa are well documented (Assan and Thomas, 2012; Ramorola, 2010; Wilson-Strydom and Thomson, 2005). However, limited research has been conducted on the successes of integrating technology into teaching and learning. This study attempted to explore both the challenges facing and successes relating to integrating technology into the curriculum as perceived by a sample of two secondary schools in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The question that was asked was "Where is our starting point, infrastructure or capacity building?" To answer this question the following objectives were designed within the framework of ISTE (2009) and Roblyer (2006): to determine if teachers have access to technology equipment to investigate if

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teachers are trained to use technology for teaching and learning activities to find out if there are ICT policies to support the curriculum The rationale behind this question was to provide data to develop a heuristic that would provide guidelines to government, schools, non-government organisations (NGOs), and other ICT facilitators when implementing ICT within a similar context.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in implementing a standards-based school curriculum is being articulated in the wider context of educational reform as the acquisition of 21st century skills, i.e. information and communication technology skills and lifelong learning abilities (Law, Lee & Chow, 2002). The rapid growth in ICTs has brought about remarkable changes in the 21st century and affected demands by the modern society. ICT is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives as well as in educational systems (Demirci, 2009). Educational reform involving technology integration is often directed at changing the teaching methods of educators or modifying the delivery of the product to students. According to Demirci (2009), teacher, textbook, and blackboard were the three most significant components of teaching and learning in the classroom not more than a few decades ago. These components compelled teachers to teach the way they were taught (Mehlinger & Powers, 2002; Wachira and Keengwe, 2010) and the infusion of technological tools into instruction poses unique challenges to instructors who are not ready and willing to change to modern constructivist teaching styles. Today's classrooms are often equipped with computers, access to the internet and projectors that allow the role of teachers to move from a traditional one to that of facilitator in the classroom (Paraskeva, Bouta & Papagianna, 2008). Teaching no longer centres around the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student; learning comes from student inquiry, critical thinking, and problemsolving based on information accessed from a variety of sources. Increased demand is therefore being placed on educational institutions to use ICT to teach the skills and knowledge that students need for the 21st century. Historically the concept of information and communication technology integration as an approach evolved as a reaction to early computer-in-schools programmes where the emphasis lay on developing computer literacy or technical knowledge of computers and the use of various computer applications (Wilson-Strydom & Thomson, 2005).

More recently information and communication technology integration has been recognised as using computers to learn, rather than learning to use computers (UNESCO/COL, 2004). Technology integration is a complex phenomenon that involves understanding teachers' motivations, perceptions, and beliefs about learning and technology (Woodbridge, 2004). It is recognised that there is a lack of computer technology integration throughout the education system (NCES, 2007). Integrating technology into the curriculum requires knowledge of the subject area, an understanding of how students learn and a level of technical expertise (Morgan, 1996). This implies that teachers need to be comfortable with computers in order to use or integrate them in their courses (Milone, 1999; Wang, 2000). According to Wachira and Keengwe (2010), technology integration means incorporating technology and technology-based practices into all aspects of teaching and learning specifically, incorporating appropriate technology in objectives, lessons, and assessment of learning outcomes. Technology in the context of teaching and learning involves the use of computers with appropriate educational software. Integration of technology can be achieved when students learn with computers in ways that include using computers efficiently and effectively in the general content areas which allows them to learn how to apply computer skills in a meaningful way, using real-life software applications that will help students learn to use computers flexibly, purposefully and creatively; when the curriculum drives technology as opposed to technology driving the curriculum; and when the goals of curriculum and technology are organised into a coordinated, harmonious whole (T.H.E Journal, 1999). By only focusing on how to use computers, and by not dealing with the issue of how to teach students more efficiently, the use of computer technology integration into education has failed (Naicker, 2011). Given these definitions, a recent study conducted in the Ghanaian second-cycle schools (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012) revealed that the hardware frequently used by teachers was the computer, and the software mostly used for integration was word processing. Teaching with technology is not simply adding technology to the existing teaching and content domain. True technology integration involves understanding and developing sensitivity to the dynamic, transactional relationship between the three components of knowledge: technology, pedagogy, and content as modelled in the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2005). To successfully integrate computers in education, the education system needs to be changed or to be adjusted accordingly (Majeed & Othman, 2012).

ICTs have great potential for knowledge dissemination, effective learning, and the development of more efficient educational services (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012). In an EU Schoolnet (2010) survey on teachers' use of Acer netbooks a large number of participants believed that the use of netbooks had a positive impact on their learning, promoted individualised learning and helped to lengthen study beyond the school day. Although computer technology has a great potential to reform or even transform education, a study by Lim and Khine (2006) reported that educators believed that the mere use of computers in their lessons excited and motivated their students to learn. Moreover, the adoption of ICT by education has been seen as a powerful way to contribute to educational change, better prepare students for the information age, improve learning outcomes and competencies of learners, and equip students with survival skills for the information society. Information and communication technology has not only changed the role of teachers in classrooms but has also provided them with a large number of software packages and websites that can be utilised for educational purposes. Rapid technological development is affording teachers new opportunities to test many more software packages and websites in their lessons (Demirci, 2009). PowerPoint, MS Word and Excel are among the most commonly used software packages in schools today and have pedagogical benefits. Educational change is a slow process, and some educators require more time to gain experience with computers (Naicker, 2011). Educators are sensitive to change and if they do not see a change without any clearly recognised benefits, such as increased efficiency in administrative tasks and improvement in the learners' understanding of the subject, they will be hesitant to use computers in their teaching (Ward & Parr, 2010). Using technology obliges educators to adopt different teaching styles (Zhao and Cziko, 2001). Rather than viewing technology as merely a tool for delivery, it should be seen as a

means to improve learning (Keengwe et al., 2008). Providing technology resources without effectively integrating them into instruction will not produce better learners (Tolmie, 2001). Unless simultaneous innovations occur in pedagogy, assessment, and other primary areas of education reform, technology by itself would not help improve education but instead continue to reinforce many educators' cynicism about fads based on magical machines (Dede, 2000).

Conclusion

There is no clear-cut line between the successes and challenges experienced by teachers in integrating technology into teaching and learning activities, the findings of this study are summarised and discussed by grouping the questions for interviews into different topics. Generally, participants view teachers who are presently teaching education technology as being unqualified in terms of integrating technology into teaching and learning. Participants also highlighted this shortage of qualified teachers as negatively affecting the process of technology integration. For effective technology integration to take place, sufficient numbers of teachers need to be trained first, so as to equip the learners with the 21st century technology skills. Based on the literature as well as the findings of the study, it is recommended that teachers and technology education specialists be given sufficient training in the following areas: technology content knowledge, and maintenance and technical skills. In addition teacher professional development programmes should be continuously provided for teachers to update their technology knowledge and skills. In conclusion, literature indicated the availability of infrastructure in South Africa. This study therefore proposes capacity building as a priority. If teachers are well equipped with technology knowledge and skills, they will be able to utilise the available technology tools.

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