

Chapter Nine

Learning and Teaching English with Technology at the University of Jos

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1. Introduction

This chapter chronicles a first-person account of efforts to introduce educational technology in teaching various courses in the Department of English at the University of Jos. The account highlights the motivation for introducing educational technology as a mediating tool, the challenges faced, the successes recorded and the projection of what the trends portend for the future. The chapter is organised as follows: the educational problem is identified that became an opportunity to introduce educational ICTs. The next part recounts the journey from the first fledgling efforts and how things have changed over the years. This is followed by a reflection on the challenges faced, how they were addressed and lessons learned. Specifically, it describes some of the pedagogical approaches that educational technology afforded in addressing some of the challenges faced in teaching English Grammatical Structures. The concluding part looks at the future, and points out that if one is properly motivated and has clearly identified the potential of technology to mediate educational challenges, success is possible.

2. The Problem/Opportunity for Educational ICTs

Higher education in African countries, including Nigeria, is plagued by many challenges. One of these is escalating student enrolments without commensurate improvement in infrastructure or manpower leading to overcrowding (Dooga, 2010; Adewumi et al, 2011). A 2007 report published in *ICTs and Higher Education in Africa* states that “overcrowding is a major issue in Nigeria HEIs, having a direct and negative social impact on students and on teachers” (Czerniewicz, Ngugi & Rose-Innes, 2007:72), resulting in a disproportionate teacher-student ratio. More disturbing is the progressively diminishing competence in English Language on the part of those entering higher education in Nigeria. Poor language skills become even more problematic for those registered to study English. Language is best learned through practice, and is best taught through systematic instructor guidance, modelling and scaffolding. Furthermore, Brown notes that ‘interaction is the heart of communication’ and that “the best way to learn to interact is through interaction itself” (1994 cited in Kasuya, 2007:159). Thus such large classes have made it increasingly difficult, and sometimes impossible, to teach students such practical skills as language skills, which are better taught through “guided participation” (Shaffer 2006:129). Large class sizes discourage incremental student assessment because of the sheer volume of papers the instructor will have to mark and provide feedback on. Ng’ambi (2005) cites other

challenges in the South African context to include student under preparedness, diversity and renewed demands for student throughput. Nigeria has similar educational challenges.

3. The Journey So Far

3.1 Use of English: Although English is the official language of learning in Nigeria starting from elementary school, many learners entering higher education in Nigeria still face challenges on thinking in English because they are influenced by their native tongue and cultural patterns. Kaplan (2010) opines that often, the language construction of foreign-language learners in second language classes is out of focus because the second language learner tends to employ rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violates the expectations of the native speaker. In practice, many rural schools often use the local language(s) of the area to teach, thus further weakening the students' ability to be conversant with learning complex abstract concepts in English. Overall, reports show that the performance of candidates at the West African Examination Council in English at the Ordinary Level examination is very low. One report states: "It was appalling that out of 1,351,557 candidates who sat for May/June 2010 West African Senior School Certificate Examination, (WASSCE), 337,071 candidates representing 24.94 per cent obtained credits in English Language, Mathematics and other three subjects."⁶ Several factors have been identified as responsible for the poor performance, including "poor language skills and expression, insufficient preparation, misinterpretation of questions, inadequate technical competence and poor handwriting" (<http://temicity.com/index.php?topic=959.0>, retrieved October 5, 2010). Even the fraction of the 24.94 per cent who eventually get a placement to read English at the University lack the knowledge needed to cope with their studies in English as a specialized field. One common tendency is to transfer the intuitive grammatical structure of the local language into the structure of English and to sometimes assign the meaning of local language terms to English terms which have some level of homophony with words in the local language.

As a consequence of these factors, most candidates enrolled at the University lack the knowledge of English that would support basic meaningful speech and writing, although the University takes as a basic assumption that they have such knowledge. And it is worse when such new entrants subscribe to study English as a specialised course. Many are

⁶ Compass Newspaper. Web. October 5, 2010.
http://www.compassnewspaper.com/NG/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67233:waec-who-is-to-blame-for-students-poor-performance-&catid=38:life-a-style&Itemid=689.

unable to distinguish a verb from a noun in practice, although they can define these elements by rote. Over the years, I discovered that students came into the Department with a negative attitude of grammatical structures, concluding that grammar cannot be mastered, even before experiencing it in class. One explanation for this is the poor results most obtain at the final national examination. Then there is the perennial attitude of students to attribute poor performance in assessments to the instructor who “gave” them low scores while attributing high scores to their efforts as what they “earned.”

3.2 Vexing Questions in Search of Answers: Most students also lack the skills to listen productively and take meaningful notes. Instead, they focus on dictation and attempt to write down lectures verbatim, leading to frustration, lack of concentration, and poor comprehension. In an institution where there are no support programmes to help new students develop study skills, the frustration of learners who have not been accustomed to the lecturing format in higher education is intense. In the light of these challenges, I began to ask: is it possible to present abstract concepts in more visual ways that would be appealing to learners with a combination of graphic, tabular and other illustrations, making it easier to comprehend? Is it possible to curb this “stenographic disposition” (Dooga 2009) of students by providing online notes in advance so that students may review upcoming lectures and during face to face (f2f) contact they will concentrate on productive listening and thus engage meaningfully in class discourse, perhaps even ask intelligent questions and expand the intellectual debate? Is it possible to provide learners with opportunities to practice their language skills and receive feedback to help build their self-confidence despite the large classes? Is it possible to help students assess their performance in ways other than mid-semester formative graded assessments or end of semester exams? I was convinced that if students had such opportunities for non-threatening self-assessment and received feedback, they would gauge their performance and thus know where they need to improve. Doing so would reduce the tendency to accuse the course instructor for “giving” them low marks. The search for answers to these questions led to the introduction of technology mediated teaching and learning in the Department of English.

3.3 Difficult Beginnings: As a first step, I created PowerPoint slides for my lectures. Because these included pictorial illustrations and had the additional benefit of being visual, it would make lecture delivery easier for me, and make lecture hours more appealing and enjoyable by learners. But delivering lectures by PowerPoint was not easy. First, there was the problem of incessant power cuts. I surmounted that problem when I observed that generally, the University’s alternative source of power supply was usually available up to 4:00pm. So I rescheduled my lectures to hold within the hours when I was likely to have

electricity. But that did not solve the problem. It turned out that lecture halls, in the Faculty of Arts, had no functioning power sockets for connecting electronic appliances, even if there was electricity. I followed the official University procedure for lodging complaints for repairs. Still, I could not find an outlet in the lecture halls to connect the projector. It seemed like the end of the road. But I would not give up. Therefore I considered using my office which had a power outlet. However, it was narrow, had no seats, and my class sizes were large (more than 100 students). Nevertheless, I experimented with this option on two occasions and quickly realised that it was not suitable to deliver classes in this manner (see two pictures below). Although I could use technology, it only exacerbated the problem of overcrowding as my office was far less comfortable as a learning environment than the lecture halls. The experiment also showed very clearly that the focus should not be on the technology as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving desired pedagogical outcomes, achieve better learning outcomes and make the learning experience more pleasurable. This lesson has stuck with me ever since. I had to think of other technological options.



Figure 35: Students receiving lectures in a grammar class



Figure 36: Another cross section of students receiving lectures (with some) sitting on the floor-mat in an office

Another consideration was to provide lecture notes to students prior to contact lecture sessions. This approach was informed by literature, particularly that of Churches (2008) on creating an online learning model – a model premised on the belief that learning is a process. As a process, it should take the learner from one step to another, as the learner reaches out to achieve higher cognitive functions. Following Bloom’s revised taxonomy, this progressive learning process takes an upward curve from what are called Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) to Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Churches argues that in principle each stage below is linked to the one immediately above it on the taxonomy, although the learning process may start at any stage on the scale. In a sense, lower level functions have an inevitable domino effect on the potential for acquiring higher level cognitive functions.

Thus, the specific aim of the online learning design for the Introduction to the English Language course was to equip learners with these Lower Order Thinking Skills to prepare them to pursue higher order cognitive skills in the remaining three years of their degree programme in English. The implication of this objective is that the design begins with a behaviourist or associative theory, focusing on the presentation of information, helping learners to recall facts, define concepts, and apply explanations (Churches, 2008). Thus, rather than dwell on the definitions, I used them only as a point of reference from which to set up activities and points for discussion.

Therefore by November 2006, I set up the English Language II course on a learning management system called the Knowledge Environment for Web-based Learning (KEWL), and enrolled 90 students. The objective was to give learners access to course notes in advance so that during face-to-face lectures, they would not be unduly distracted by their poor attempts to take down verbatim notes.

I also desired to set up practice exercises and conduct assessments, both formative and summative. But KEWL was still under construction and was very unstable. Frustratingly, many features returned error messages which could not be resolved locally, except in South Africa. Even so, modest gains were recorded. The availability of lecture notes online caused quite a stir among students. It also significantly reduced their anxiety to write notes during lectures. With notes that most had already printed and read, they were persuaded to concentrate on listening actively during f2f class sessions. In turn topics could be handled more expeditiously. I could use lecture hours to discuss, analyse, explain and illustrate concepts instead of dictating notes which would be written down imperfectly at best. This approach appeared to have some effect on students' performance with a reduction in the failure rate.

Out of the 90 students who took the final examination in the first semester, 20 students failed, whereas in the second semester where this blended learning mode was introduced, only nine students failed out of 89 who sat for the final examination. Although it could be argued that several other factors could have contributed to the improved performance, such as students adjusting to university life, when the first and second semester examinations of two previous years were compared, they showed no such significant improvement. What I failed to do, but which could have provided an even clearer picture, was to have conducted a post-test, which could then have been compared with the pre-test which was conducted at the beginning of the course.

3.4 The Introduction of Moodle and the Formation of the ICT Directorate: By October 2007, there were other significant changes regarding ICT taking place at a broader level at the university, with efforts focussing on bringing all the ICT units of the University into one Directorate. This realignment made the IT support in the University more cohesive and coordinated. With a central command structure, it also became easier to know where to lodge complaints or to seek support. Additionally, the ICT unit was able to provide support to academic and administrative units in a timely and meaningful manner. Concurrent with this, the University also installed Moodle, a new Learning Management System (LMS) to replace KEWL. By February 2008, Moodle officially became the University's preferred LMS. .

The newly formed ICT Directorate played a very active and useful role in supporting those who wished to use this facility. The Directorate arranged orientation for all students who were enrolled in courses that were taught using the blended learning format. This is a method that combines the best of online and face-to-face instruction to improve outcomes and increase access in a cost-effective way. This involved providing direction to students on how to use Moodle and this orientation was regarded as sufficient to give new users the required head start to effectively work online as the platform is user-friendly. This provided students with confidence, most of who had very little previous knowledge of computers. This exposure has over the years stimulated many to seek out ways to acquire additional computer literacy.

3.5 From KEWL to Moodle: During this time I thus migrated the content of the introductory English Language course from KEWL to Moodle, updated it and created two more courses: the first semester component of the course that was already online, and a third year undergraduate course, Discourse Analysis. In Moodle, it was possible to create quizzes, practice exercises, chat sessions and discussion forums. Students could also send questions and comments by email to each other and to the instructor within the system. In on-campus universities such as the University of Jos, blended online learning promises the best of both worlds. Effective peer-to-peer interaction is difficult to achieve in a focused, systematic way because of large class sizes. Yet, these are invaluable to effective learning. So following f2f class interaction with learners, activities are set up, guided and monitored that help learners interact in a meaningful way. Large classes also make it difficult for a majority of students to have their voices heard and their concerns known to instructors. Online access to the course provides many, including those who are shy the opportunity to express themselves freely, ask questions and receive feedback. It also brings out the best in learners as they have the opportunity to respond to questions and discussions in a more reflective, deliberate way instead of the often ad hoc, spontaneous responses that characterize in-class discussions.

By 2011, five courses from the Department of English were fully available on Moodle with registered students actively engaging with resources, their peers and the instructor. These comprised three undergraduate courses and two postgraduate courses. Four of the five courses were developed and taught by me, and I co-taught the fifth, a postgraduate course, with a professor who was the principal instructor.

The development of the courses drew on the behaviourist theory described above, but additionally focussed on constructivist theories - to help the learner to progress beyond

remembering and understanding to the point of problem-solving. This approach was based on Siemens and Tittenberger (2009), who list four broad components of this approach: Social, Situated, Reflective and Multi-faceted. The social element was key in the design of the more theoretic courses at the third year level such as the Discourse Analysis course as well as for the two postgraduate courses Principles of Translation and Pragmatics and Communication. For example, instead of merely teaching theories of discourse, the Online Discussion Forums provided opportunities for learners to actually reflect on these theories and principles and in the process of such engagement, create various forms of discourse. Similarly, the two postgraduate courses were really meant to be seminar-intensive. However, f2f seminars lacked rigor as fellow learners usually had no copies of the presentations made by their colleagues and so could only respond on the spur of the moment to what they heard their colleagues say during the few minutes of oral presentation. In addition, in f2f presentations, not much time could be assigned to discuss someone's presentation in view of time. But online, such constraints were removed. Thus every learner had access to the presentations of everyone, and everyone could reflectively comment on the presentation of colleagues and even comment on the responses made to various presentations. Finally, all the interaction online also became a rich and valuable resource as it was archived and could be retrieved by all at any time during the course, something that could not be achieved in f3f class presentations.

Thus, the design for the Introduction to the English Language course for first year students began with a pilot on "Mastering the English Verb." The purpose of the pilot was to determine whether the design was useful and relevant in addressing the challenges identified in teaching the course. It was also to confirm that the eventual time and resources that would be invested in developing such a course would not be in vain. To evaluate the pilot design, I needed to get feedback, both from an instructor's perspective and a learner's perspective. I got a colleague in the department whose study area includes grammar to evaluate the pilot. I also had a former student of the course evaluate the design and content, including the quizzes. Their feedback informed the final that was implemented. The main motivation of the course design was to provide learners with a series of hands-on activities and exercises that would help them practice what they had learned, help them test whether and to what extent they had understood the concepts and help them relate with the parts of speech more deeply and in a variety of contexts. Initially, I felt that in the online component of the course, I should just concentrate on designing the tasks or activities that would provide learners with the opportunities for practice, self-tests and evaluation. However, upon reflection, it became clear that the practice exercises, the quizzes and tests needed to be anchored on prior instruction. Furthermore, the process, rationale and content of such instruction against which the tasks were designed also

needed to be made clear online, even though learners already engaged with these in the face-to-face component. Consequently, the online learning design model began with study lessons and the content.

Learning theories such as those described as “social constructivist” were found to be useful and to actively engage more advanced learners, but the principles were also found to be useful to younger learners. The following diagram shows the conceptual framework of the design for a first year foundation course.

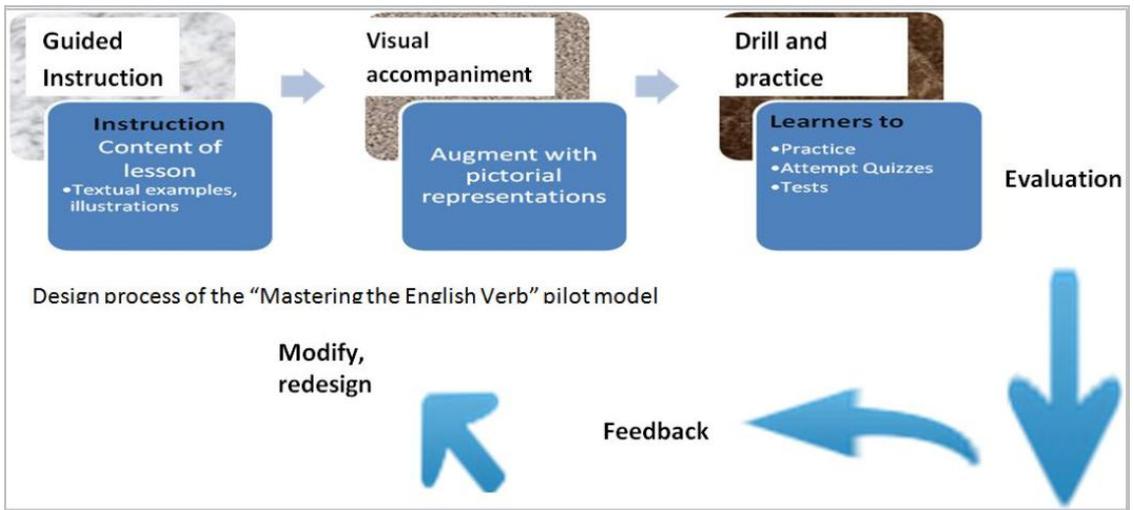


Figure 37: The conceptual framework of the online design of Introduction to the English Language

The idea of the evaluation in the design in Figure 37 is that, at the end of each module or topic, learners will be evaluated through various assessments to determine their level of cognition. Feedback was sought from the results of students’ performance in assessments, their postings in the feedback mail provided on the course page, and eventually in the final examinations. Such module-specific evaluation as well as the overall feedback from the course would lead to appropriate modifications and possible redesign of the course or parts thereof as required. In designing the courses, I was conscious of the fact that today’s modern classroom in whichever form (online or campus-based), uses e-learning tools and Learning Management Systems that capture student cognition and engages them in the learning process via technology, while increasing their need for self-directedness. Therefore, in designing the course on the Introduction to the English Language, I sought to capture the learner’s ability to work independently by creating self-paced, recursive and self-evaluative practice quizzes. These followed every lesson and took several of the six possible forms, including multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword,

matching/ordering, and gap-fill. Although these were non-gradable quizzes in the sense that test results did not form part of the final course grade, the results were nevertheless weighted and archived electronically in the Moodle grade book so that it would be possible to retrieve and analyse the progress of learners and thus determine the impact of the online component on their learning. Generally, formative assessments were difficult to perform due to large class sizes. But the non-gradable periodic assessments gradually became fun to learners once they got used to them. More important, in the process of attempting the module-by-module assessments, they were practicing how to correctly approach questions in the course. That helped to increase their confidence.

Introducing this technology in my teaching forced me to re-think my pedagogy, my teaching methods, and the introduction of technological tools. For example, I noted that although the Online Discussion Forum was a good tool, it was not as effective in a grammar course such as the introductory English Language course as it was for third year level and postgraduate courses. For the grammar course, quizzes were more useful as forms of formative exercise. Learners were also asked to respond to problem-based questions, recording the solutions in their online journals. Over the years, I have experimented with various other tools such as wikis, especially for introductory courses. It is usually helpful to ask learners to not only define, but provide examples to illustrate the concepts that they have defined. And when such concepts are not such that are typically found in conventional dictionaries, the efforts and inputs of students become even more valuable to their peers. Such definitions with examples and illustrations also give the instructor and insight into how learners interpret such concepts and help him/her intervene as needed.

In order to teach a course using the online blended approach, it was necessary to clearly outline course objectives, learning outcomes, assessment formats and methods, the method(s) to be adopted in teaching the course and the expectation for learners. It was also necessary to outline the objectives of individual modules or topics in a course and outcomes. This brought to my attention the need to think out well in advance and definitively document such information. Attempting to provide such information inevitably forced me to learn about how to learn, learn about how to teach and learn about how to assess and what kinds of assessment are suitable for what kinds of knowledge. Overall, this knowledge has greatly enriched my experience and improved my delivery as an instructor.

3.6 mLearning: In asynchronous blended elearning, students engage online after their lecture hours, usually in the evenings and on weekends. However, persistent security challenges in Jos made it dangerous for students to venture out of their accommodations

to access the internet at public locations. At the same time that this challenge was becoming apparent, a new possibility began to emerge. More and more students were acquiring mobile phones that had capacity for internet connectivity. Some even had smart phones. Some students attempted (unsuccessfully) to access course resources on Moodle using their phones and other hand-held devices. But at the time, the University Moodle platform had not been configured to be accessed on mobile devices. Noticing this need, I approached the ICT Directorate and requested for the plug-in for mobile learning engine to be installed. This was done in January 2011 opening the way for students to access learning resources in their courses on their mobile devices, collaborate in group work with their peers, carry out self-test quizzes online, ask questions on the subject matter and receive feedback, sometimes doing so in real time, write and submit assignments anywhere, anytime. It also drastically diminished the problem of inadequate computers and epileptic power supply, since internet access could be achieved on mobile phones. The implication of this development is that, going forward, students with internet-active phones can use them as a functional learning tools, not only as tools for social engagement. The mobile learning dimension also had implications for course design and the selection of enabling technology tools that would enable mobile web access.

3.7 Challenges to Getting Students to Learn Online: Over the years, it has been challenging to enrol students on Moodle particularly due to student admission procedures. Often, student admission into the university can continue up to several weeks into the semester. As a result many first year students join the class late, sometimes several weeks into the semester. They thereby miss the orientation. Delaying the orientation would mean delaying the online interaction of learners or missing out on it altogether. Perhaps in future, it will be possible for the ICT Directorate to organise several such orientation exercises to accommodate those who get registered late. Another result of late admissions is that such students need to be registered online individually, piecemeal, which creates additional logistic problems for the instructor. Almost every week, a student shows up requesting to be registered online. Moodle has a feature for self-registration, but with many students having no prior knowledge of computer use, requiring new users to self-register often creates more problems. In some institutions where eLearning has become mainstream, the Management Information System (MIS) student registration database automatically enrolls students online in the courses they have selected. For example, at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, new students do not need to be separately enrolled on Vula, that institution's eLearning platform. New students are given a username and password once they submit their application. It helps them to track the admission process online in PeopleSoft. Once admitted, the username becomes their registration number, and they can immediately use their login details to access their registered courses

on the institutional elearning platform. Furthermore, an email account is automatically created for all registered students (<http://www.icts.uct.ac.za/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1012>). It is hoped that such synchronization will soon become possible at University of Jos and thus solve this problem.

3.8 Gauging the Impact of Technology Mediated English Language Teaching and Learning:

It is tempting to evaluate the success or otherwise of an eLearning intervention in a course solely in terms of students' performance in the final examination (MikeJenny 2010). In fact, many would see the final exam score as the main, perhaps only viable way to determine whether an online intervention is successful or not. But this linear, cause-and-effect view is misleading as it overlooks the complex factors that contribute to students' performance. Moreover, at this exploratory stage of using elearning, it would be insincere to attribute improved exam scores solely to the effect of elearning. So, to evaluate the efficacy of the online courses, I adopted the outcomes monitoring approach which recognises that there are multiple, non-linear events which lead to change. This approach rejects the cause-effect framework of such performance indicators as exam results to evaluate the products (MikeJenny 2010) while acknowledging that exam results can be just one variable in such an evaluation. This involved setting up simple, specific, measurable indicators. In designing the Introduction to the English Language course, I created a pre-test. This was to determine the entry-level knowledge of students enrolled in the course and served as a benchmark for measuring progress. The pre-test covered all the topics in the course, since these topics are treated at the school certificate level. The following is a screen shot image of the pre-test page.

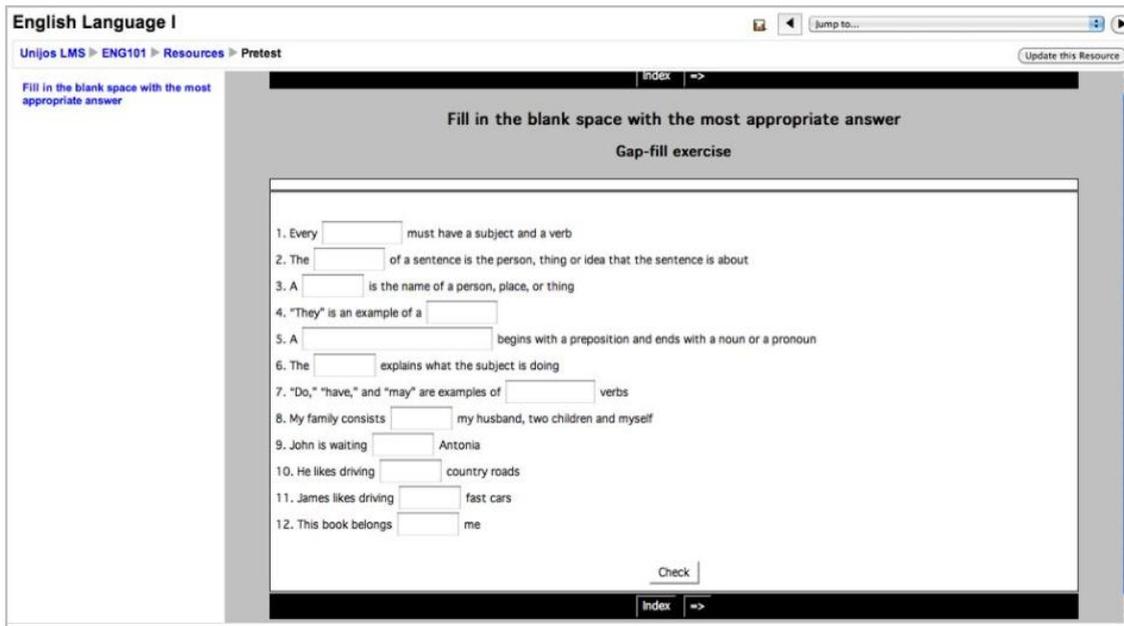


Figure 38: Screen shot image of pre-test quiz

In addition to the pre-test, each lesson was followed by a series of self-paced, recursive and self-evaluative practice quizzes and took several of the six possible forms, including multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering, and gap-fill. The results were weighted and archived electronically in the Moodle grade book making it possible to retrieve and analyse the progress of learners and thus determine the impact of the online component on their learning.

In addition, I conducted periodic surveys for all the courses in English that I taught using blended learning except the introductory first year courses, to determine learners' views of online learning in general and various aspects thereof. In each survey, all learners taking the specified course(s) were targeted. In order to reduce instrument reactivity and impose control over conditions that would otherwise cloud or threaten the validity of the results, I took the following measures in administering the surveys:

1. The surveys were administered to learners after the final examination results were released in the course(s) for which the survey was conducted. This was done in recognition that my influence as course lecturer/researcher could induce respondents' attempt to please through "hypothesis guessing" (Cooper & Schindler 2003:151). Thus, it was hoped that knowing that their responses in the survey would not in any way affect the results of their final exams would elicit reliable responses.

2. The surveys did not request the personal details of respondents, and it is believed that the anonymity of respondents would also encourage frank responses.

3. The surveys were conducted online. In this way, learners did not have to be afraid of any likelihood that they would be identified by their handwriting. The surveys were in Survey Monkey, but the link was on the course site, so respondents had to first login to the course to access the link. This was to control non-course students from taking the survey. Nevertheless, the login identities of respondents were not captured in the survey itself.

Eighty five students were asked to take the survey. Out of these, 74 completed it, representing 87 percent response. Ninety two percent said the online component kept them busy and focused, 86 percent said the online resources made additional reading easier and 78 percent said the online component kept them connected to the course and their colleagues.

The follow-up question was, “what comments can you make about the resources for the course?” Twenty five percent said the resources were not very explanatory. But upon reflection, it was clear that the question was ill-framed. First, it requested for comments from respondents but provided no room for free response. Instead, it provided four options which constrained responses. . But it showed that the resources were relevant to the learners. However, the choices provided did not give sufficient room for respondents to express exactly how, or in what way(s) they found the resources relevant, as most did not feel that the online resources explained concepts very well.

Another question focused on the Online Discussion Forum, a particular activity tool for the course. The question requested respondents to describe the effect the online discussion forums had on their learning experience. Nearly all respondents said that that the Online Discussion Forums exposed them to various points of view, encouraged them to share their ideas freely and openly and helped them appreciate the ideas of others. Of particular significance were the responses received on the general value of incorporating elearning into the course. The following responses were recorded:

“E-learning should be encouraged at all levels of academics.”

“The online and class (face to face) approach is a very commendable step towards developing learning especially in the Department of English.”

“The course is very interesting with the online learning platform providing stimulating vistas and challenges which . . . will make learning easier, make the graduates able to justify the certificates they receive and be better able/equipped to cope in this technology driven age.”

“It has widened my horizon and enhanced my proficiency and credibility in the field and in the use of online resources. It has further enhanced my competence in the language study.”

“Students should be given an extensive orientation on e-learning before they start the course. Pragmatics is a practical course. If we have more articles written by Nigerians or Africans made available to students, it would aid comprehension since examples and illustrations therein are expected to be as indigenous as possible.”

4. Conclusion

The early attempts to introduce elearning in the Department of English resulted in me learning two valuable lessons: the first is that the focus must always be on the learning, not only on the “e,” on the technology. Technology should be viewed as a tool to be employed, if and when required to achieve best practice. Second, one should not wait to have everything in place before embarking on elearning. Institutional adoption of eLearning would most times require a proof of concept or some model to be used as a reference point. The practice in the Department of English became one of those early proofs of concepts that others would later reference and improve upon.

In the few years that eLearning has been implemented in the Department of English, it has generated considerable enthusiasm among students, creating greater awareness of its benefits, or at least creating positive curiosity from both faculty and students. This interest has put a searchlight on the practice, making it imperative to constantly look for improved course design built around more informed pedagogical considerations and delivery methods. Although different sets of students have experienced eLearning, over time, the consistent use of the blended learning approach in some of the courses has gradually become established in the Department. Students therefore become aware that they will study in these courses through blended learning even before they subscribe for them. The increasing insecurity in this part of Nigeria has coincided with the growing availability and affordability of smart phones and other high-end hand-held devices and made the practice of elearning even more attractive, since learners can now perform a lot of their learning functions on the move.

University administration is interested in having technology supported learning become an institution-wide practice. A good development in recent time has been the directive from the University Senate for the outline and summaries of all course offerings in the University to be made available on the learning management system. In the Department of English, efforts are being made to have more lecturers adopt this method of teaching. A few are

receiving specialized training through the eFellowship programme. With the present momentum in the Department of English as well as other departments across the University, it is clear that if such constraining factors such as electricity supply improve and the bandwidth is upgraded to ease connectivity, learning with technology will soon become the norm across the University, and not the exception.

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