

Original Research Article

Learning Literature in English in the 21st Century: Turning Digital World Challenges into Grabbable Opportunities

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Abstract: The 21st century unravels how education needs to provide learners with transformative skills, knowledge, attitudes and competencies to help them maximize opportunities while coping with challenges related with the digital world. Teaching Literature nowadays must target not only literary competence development but also other subjects especially in a world driven by Information Communication Technology (ICT) in all sectors of life. In this study, the researcher delves into the merits and demerits of learning literature in a second language in a digital world. Using questionnaire administered to students in literary combinations, information collected revealed lack of access to some important online materials, few or lack of ICT gadgets, oral tradition dwindling, the copy paste culture, students laziness and little interest in reading among other challenges. Opportunities were identified such as accessible various online sources, fresh materials, easy material storage, research and innovation facilities, English language learning through literature and integration of ICT in literature among others. To produce graduates fitting the needs of the current century, it is pertinent to address the reported challenges and grab the identified opportunities with two hands.

Keywords: 21st century education, literature in English, challenges, opportunities, digital world, ICT gadgets.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Teaching and learning in the world today needs necessarily integration of ICT in Higher Education Curriculum (Mushimiyimana *et al.*, 2022). Research unravels that Literature curriculum is important not only for literary competence development but also other subjects especially for the 21st century geared by Information Communication Technology (ICT) in all sectors of life. Acedo *et al.*, (2014) contended that “teaching in the 21st century could align with underlying goals for a peaceful, sustainable world with balanced reflection on the roles of technology and wealth.” In fact, the advancement of technology is rather an opportunity than a challenge to education for learners to get involved and more motivated in their learning (Asri *et al.*, (2017). In Literature, learners are exposed to a variety of digitalised materials and libraries offering opportunities to read whenever they wish and from where they are. Despite a remarkable regress of people’s interest in reading (Nzeyimana *et al.*, 2019), research (Pokrivčáková *et al.*, 2017) contend that 21st century literary education needs be redefined, with an aim to help learners relate literary solutions

with their current lives. Indeed, it is proved beyond doubt that interest needs be developed in that glorious subject since it is beneficial to students’ linguistic competence, intellectual capacity, social awareness, and cultural understanding (Akhter, 2013; Irwansyah *et al.*, 2017); because through literature learners are taught identity, both local and multilingual cultures values. As Dass (2013) noted, teachers and students must not undermine the invaluable part of literature in teaching and learning other subjects. According to Ramnath (2016), literature teaching could aim at the practical aim, including the enhancement of language - through - literature, rather than terminological considerations.

De facto, in a digital world, the merits of written art are becoming mightier and more reliable than they were formerly. Today digital libraries have become an opportunity for learners at different levels without exception to literature in English. When the latter is taught students who use or learn English as a second language, they are faced with a number of challenges but benefit from many opportunities too. Teaching literature in the current world must therefore seize the digital related opportunities while coping with

the challenges that impede effective learning. This means that careful selection of the materials is also important as opined in Bulsan (2019) that literature material [of the 21st century] needs be authentically rich with cultural values and is easy to understand by beneficiary learners; thus easy for the teachers to enhance their linguistic competences because language and literature are closely interwoven.

Problem Statement

The advancement of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the 21st century is changing the current world into a capsule where much information exists (Mod et al., 2020), causing some people to adapt difficultly at social, economic and technological levels (Miah et al., 2018). For learners to successfully cope with the current and future challenges, education of the this century must connect learners with real life and provide them with transformative competencies such as defined in OECD (2018) as “the types of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values learners need to transform society and shape the future for better lives. These have been identified as creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility. The three competences cannot be developed without having good command of language skills for effective communication among co-workers or cohabitation. According to Erdoğan (2019), communication and collaboration skills cannot be distanced and are vital especially in the current global society because, the more people communicate and cooperate among themselves, the more knowledgeable, creative and innovative they become. In point of fact, when equipped with digital tools, the 21st century learners need align with the OECD learning framework. However, despite that in higher learning institutions, Literature in English is taught not only to equip learners with literary generic forms and content but also enhance language skills (Bazimaziki, 2020; Aladiini et al., 2020), some students are disadvantaged while they could maximize available opportunities. Against this situation, the researcher wanted to scrutinize the digital world opportunities and related challenges.

Aims and scope

This study is mainly concerned with the current situation of teaching Literature in English in EFL classes in the digital world geared by Information Communication Technology. On the one hand, the researcher explores available opportunities for students

to learn effectively literature in a second language. On the other hand, challenges are examined based on students’ perceptions on what need be done for effective learning that subject. The study was guided by three questions viz (1) What are the opportunities of learning Literature in English in digital world? (2) What are the challenges do students face in learning literature in English? and (3) What can be done to address the identified challenges? To seek answers for these questions, the researcher used questionnaire to gather information from literary combinations learners in University of Rwanda, College of Education. Not all students were involved. Rather, judgement sampling was used as explained hereinafter.

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative and interpretive approach. Acedo et al., (2014) claim that nowadays education systems need to be restructured so that it is relevant to today’s world and focuses on competences: the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values people need to make sense of and address complex problems. Thus, the researcher takes much consideration in the view that teaching literature in English in the 21st century need to align with underlying educational goals for a peaceful and sustainable world with balanced reflection on the roles of technology and wealth. To that end, questionnaire was used as an instrument to gather information from participants. The questionnaire questions covered the themes such as challenges and opportunities of learning literature in English in digital world. Possible remedies for challenges to be addressed was considered as the third theme. A judgement sample of thirty six (36) students was selected from students who learn literary subjects. Descriptive analysis of data collected was done in the light of secondary sources dealing with the 21st century education needs and expectations. These sources include journal articles, books and book chapters by from various gurus as cited herein.

RESULTS

In this study, information was gathered based on three themes viz challenges, opportunities and remedies to cope with difficulties and fully grab the identified opportunities. Data collected are presented below.

Table 1: Sample distribution

Combination	Level	Number	%	Gender				Age categories							
				F	%	M	%	19-22	%	23-26	%	27-30	%	31-34	%
ELE	2	24	66.7	6	16.6	18	50	14	38.9	9	25	1	2.8	0	0
SNE	2	12	33.4	4	11.1	8	22.3	1	2.8	0	0	5	13.8	6	16.6
Total		36	100	10	27.7	26	72.3	15	41.7	9	25	6	16.6	6	16.6

The above table identifies 36 participants in this study. All are level two students pursuing undergraduate program in University of Rwanda, College of Education. 66.7% of them are doing English Literature with Education (ELE) while the rest (33.4%) are doing Special Needs English (SNE). Majority of them (72.3%) are male while a few (27.7% are female. Concerning their age categories, 41.7% range between 19 and 22; 25% are aged between 23 and 26 while 16.6% are between 27 and 30 years and 31 to 34 for each category. These results show that they are all in

the youth category who need to learn and know about the world in which they live so that they can use knowledge gained and experience learned from literary subject as a tool to transform their world. In other words, their age category is an opportunity rather than a challenge to education of the 21st century geared by Information Communication Technology (ICT). Despite that they are young learners, they need to know the past and compare it with the world today so as to predict or project further as future leaders.

Table 2: Challenges of learning literature in a digital world

S/N	Challenge	Frequency	Percent
1	Limited financial means to access online materials	16	44
2	Oral tradition has little room in digital world	9	25
3	Lack or insufficiency of ICT gadgets	22	61
4	Little of background knowledge in literature	4	11
5	Students' laziness	8	22
6	Decrease of visit to physical library	4	11
7	Language barrier(English)	14	39
8	Copy paste culture among students	6	17
N=36			

The above table displays the percentages for each of the identified challenges of teaching literature in a digital world. As the table shows, the leading challenge is related with lack or insufficiency of ICT gadget (61%). Similarly, limited financial means to access online materials (44%) impedes effective learning. Language barrier (39%) and students' laziness (22%) to readily adapt themselves, connected with little background in literature in English for some students (11%) are factors effective their learning. Likewise, the

copy paste culture among some students (17%) was identified among those challenges. They are presented with soft rather than hard materials which make them fall into the trap of plagiarism as the visit to the physical library (11%) dwindle to some extent. More importantly, in a digital world, oral tradition(oral literature) is affected as 25% revealed it. Be that as it may, those challenges as identified by learners themselves impede learning literature taught in English - a second language to learners.

Table 3: Opportunities of learning Literature in English in a digital world

SN	Opportunity	Frequency	Percent
1	Availability of varied new/updated literature materials	14	39
2	Integration of ICT in literature	12	33
3	Learning from whenever at one's pace	19	53
4	Creativity and innovation in literature subjects	16	44
5	Learning from different sources	13	36
6	Learning English language through literature	20	56
7	Research based learning	16	44
N =36			

Concerning opportunities, Table 3 presents those identified by participants. Indeed, results in the above table reveal that learning literature in English offers learners the opportunity to access varied fresh literature materials (39%). Following closely, they show that learning literature in a digital world enables the integration of ICT in literature (33%) which is advantageous for 21st century learners. Learning from whenever at learners' pace for each is another identified opportunity rating 53%. Creativity and innovation in literature subjects (44%) followed by learning from different sources (36%) are other identified opportunities to be grabbed by students with their two

hands. Another mentioned opportunity is to learn English language through literature (56%); as congruent with Bazimaziki (2020a) that language is a tool of communication of thoughts, feelings and emotions while literature is concerned with artistic use of language to depict the socio - cultural, political and economic situations of human beings in the world they live. Further, participants revealed that learning literature in digital world bases mainly on research which is an advantage particularly in research based institutions. Thus far, there are many opportunities and challenges that need be turned into advantages for literary courses.

DISCUSSION

Ordinarily, in a challenge, our feelings say that we can achieve our aims so some individuals can say: we think we can. Yet, when we doubt our personal abilities, we can say: we think we cannot (Alidini *et al.*, 2020). Learning without materials is challenging and yields ineffectiveness. In literature, the book, book chapter, journal article, ICT gadgets and the connectivity to internet are factors that influence effective teaching and learning. The role of the learner as the central beneficiary must not be ignored. Learners must play a part to grab opportunities such as the available on-line resources. As the 21st century exposes learners to available online resources, easy to be stored, this enables them to learn from anywhere at any time, each at his/her pace. Indeed, digital world eases research based learning which engages learners. Correspondingly, it is an advantage to integrate ICT into their learning, specifically because among literature learning outcomes, ICT skills do not make exception. As English language has become an invaluable global tool of communication, business, technology and education, learners of literature in English are exposed to it through literary forms (Bazimaziki, 2020a). For example, drama can help build an independent learning in a motivating class due to the structures of learning it has. This can maximize students' engagement and participation in speaking both individually and in groups as well (Aldini *et al.*, 2020), hence developing their communication skills. In connection with doing research, students are exposed to opportunities for creativity and innovation and generate income from it. For example, by publishing and uploading their works on different websites, or channels, one generates some money and is connected with the world for further opportunities.

In contrast, the reported challenges include lack of or insufficient ICT gadgets coupled with limited financial means to access the available resources; language barrier (English as a second language); some students' laziness and copy paste culture leading to plagiarism. These are challenges to quality learning literature in the current world. In fact, without ICT gadgets, literature learning is greatly affected to the most in the world today where ICT primes in all life domains (Bazimaziki, 2020b). Additionally, oral tradition is given little room in digital world. This is another reported challenge connected with the reading culture that dwindles gradually among Rwandan society while "a reading nation is an informed nation"(Nzeyimana *et al.*, 2020). To cope with these challenges, ICT gadgets must be availed to ease access to E-resources. Although the anti plagiarism softwares are put in place to cope with the copy - paste culture, students must ban the culture of plagiarism. Field trips are recommended to collect, record and store oral materials. Holding dialogues with elders or other repositories of oral tradition will bridge the gap too. Intra - and inter universities literature competitions

must be enhanced to promote research, innovation in literature. This will boost the reading culture. Literature curriculum could be adapted to arising matters in ICT world. Parents need to play their part for their children knowledge of oral tradition that is rich and didactic to youth in particular. They could sit together and narrate fictional stories, myths, epics and share riddles or lullabies without limitation to aphorisms as they are deposited within society or family members (Bazimaziki *et al.*, 2019). Students could also be cautious when selecting the materials to read besides those assigned by teachers because all that is on line is not relevant to be cited in their academic works. Regular training to teachers could not be undermined because their role must remain central as a guiding stars to learners. Definitely, effective learning literature in English in a digital world must turn challenges into opportunities to be grabbed with two hands in favour of learners, for their future, their community and even the world.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, this study is significant for learning enhancement in the current digital world, where the power of ICT gadgets is not in doubt. Learning Literature in English [currently a global language in various life domains] not only offers many opportunities for learners to grab but also brings some challenges that need be addressed for effectiveness. Because the 21st century is faced with complex problems connected with peace, technology and wealth, learners will engage with this world if teaching focuses on the development of the inter-related competencies allowing school leavers to be responsible for novelty, change, creativity, problem solving and act to one another collaboratively (OECD, 2018). Teaching Literature in English in EFL classes in the 21st century must augur such needed transformative competencies for learners to cope with the complexity of the digital world as driven by Information Communication Technology (ICT). Learners must develop language skills through literature in English to help them communicate proficiently and collaboratively so as to transform their lives and society in general. They could not fail to seize at most the digital world opportunities and play their parts for each. As this study was conducted to scrutinize students' perceptions, a related study involving teachers of literature in English is recommended to look into their challenges and perspectives in teaching literature in English in the the digital world learning environment. Further, exploring the integration of ICT in teaching literature in English at tertiary level can yield complementary findings to the present.

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