

EMPOWERING GIRLS THROUGH LANGUAGE LEARNING: LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES FOR ENHANCED EDUCATION.

OYEBOLU, Ifeoluwa D.

ifeoluwa.oyebolu@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

and

JINADU, Damilola C.

damilola.jinadu@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of language learning, technology, and gender empowerment, highlighting the potential of technology-enhanced language learning to address unique challenges faced girls in remote areas. As Dr. Uduig aptly notes, "educating a woman empowers a community," and language learning is a powerful tool for empowering women, enhancing their educational and economic opportunities, and promoting gender equality (Pennycook, 2001). Technology-enhanced language learning expands access to quality education for marginalized groups (Warschauer, 2004), but the digital divide persists, limiting benefits for women in disadvantaged regions (Warschauer, 2018). This study is aimed at answering the question of how and if technology an influence economic possibilities for girls in Africa through language education. This study investigates how digital resources and educational technologies can enhance language education for women and girls, promoting empowerment and social mobility. A random sample of 250 participants (125 women and 125 girls) from urban and rural areas was selected to explore these challenges and opportunities. Findings show that a significant number of girls in the selected locality still have very limited access to technological resources, thereby limiting their access not just to opportunities, but also to enhanced education. In relation to current trends it is believed that language education through the use of technology has the potential to improve the chances of women and girls economically.

Key words: Language learning, Technology, Enhanced education, Empowerment

Introduction.

Language serves as a tool for communication and a vehicle for thought. Language creates unique opportunities in the world today because it is more than just a tool for communication, it is a foundation for personal development, social mobility and economic independence. Studies show that women and girls with language proficiency are better positioned to access education, secure employment and participate in public

discourse UNESCO (2014). Language learning is particularly significant as it serves as a gateway to acquiring further knowledge, accessing better employment opportunities and engaging in civic life. However, in many regions, women and girls face multiple barriers to effective language learning including cultural restrictions, financial limitations and lack of access to quality resources. Therefore, empowering women and girls through language learning is pivotal to advancing gender equality and fostering social and economic development. According to Dr Pembecioglu Nulufer (2013) "language proficiency can serve as a crucial tool for women's empowerment by expanding the educational and employment opportunities". Language proficiency also breaks down barriers for women in accessing higher education and securing better job prospects. Language learning empowers women and girls by providing them valuable skills and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Language proficiency can open doors to higher education, better job opportunities, increased social mobility for women and girls in both rural and urban area of a country. Professor Kabeer Naila (1999) notes "the transformative potential of language learning in enhancing women's social and economic status". He argues that language skills enable women to engage more effectively in economic activities, negotiate better working conditions and assert their rights in various spheres of life. With language learning initiatives, women and girls can acquire essential skills to pursue education, employment and social opportunities that contribute to their empowerment and overall well-being.

Teaching French Language with Digital Resources in Nigeria

In Nigeria, French language is primarily taught in schools with the traditional grammar-translation method. Teachers instruct students in grammar rules, make a few examples, a few exercises to practice, and then the class comes to an end. This modus operandi, although gives students a passing knowledge of the French Language, does not encourage active and practical use of core language skills that could pave the way for better opportunities outside the classroom. El gazi and Ibrahimi (2024) point out that digital resources have significantly improved the pedagogical process, restructuring the French language class from being teacher centred to student centered. They also note that using digital resources to teach French language, will provide students with the opportunity of communicating with native speakers online, where they will be able to use their language skills in real life scenarios. Some of the digital resources available to teachers and learners include language learning apps, digital flashcards and the social media.

However, despite the potential of technology, challenges persist. Warschauer (2018) stress the digital divide, where access to technology and the internet remains unequal, limiting the benefits for women in disadvantaged region. According to a 2021 World Bank report, there is still a huge gap between Africans who can access technology and those who cannot. Of this teeming population of Africans who cannot access

technology, women and girls make up a sizable number. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that about 190 million women still do not have access to technology. Kwakwa (2023) points out that the major hinderance to women accessing necessary technology, is “the high cost of devices and data plans combined with women’s lower financial capacity to cover costs associated with digital access.” It is important that efforts be doubled to bridge this gap in order to empower more women. This paper investigates how digital technology and targeted educational resources can bridge these gaps, offering pathways to empowerment for women and girls through language learning which is central to communication, education and participation in the society.

Digital technologies have the potential to transform traditional education models by offering scalable, flexible and personalized learning experiences. Mobile applications, virtual classrooms and artificial intelligence- driven language programs can be particularly beneficial for women and girls in remote areas who may lack access to formal schooling due to cultural, economic or security constraints. Malloy and Allen (2018) highlight the effectiveness of these technological interventions in overcoming barriers related to time, mobility and resources. According to Gakunzi (2020), the use of culturally tailored resources can enhance the motivation and engagement of learners, especially girls from indigenous or minority communities. This focus on contextualized learning further supports the empowerment of women and girls by respecting their linguistic and cultural identities. However, challenges such as the digital divide, gender bias in technology design and limited digital literacy among women must be addressed to fully realize the potential of technology in language education.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative), analysing existing literature on the subject of teaching French language as a foreign language (FLE) with the aid of digital resources, and interacting with women and girls to find out how much access they have to digital resources. Data collection methods also included structured questionnaires which were used to collect quantitative data on women and girls to know their experiences and challenges in their pursuit of learning French language with digital resources. In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gather qualitative insights. 250 participants comprising 125 women and 125 girls, aged 15-45 from urban and rural areas of Ogun and Lagos state, Nigeria. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling based on age, location and employment status to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demography

This summary highlights the key findings from our questionnaire and interviews which gathered responses from 250 participants. The results are presented in percentage to provide a clear overview of the responses.

Question	Response Options	Percentage
Age	Under 18	12%
	18-24	35%
	25-34	28%
	35-44	15%
	45 and above	10%
Location	Urban	55%
	Rural	30%
	Semi-Urban	15%
Educational Level	No formal education	5%
	Primary education	15%
	Secondary education	30%
	Higher education (college / university)	40%
	Other	10%
Occupation	Student	25%
	Employed	40%
	Unemployed	10%
	Self-employed	10%
	Homemaker	10%

	Other	5%
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These tables above summarize the results of the study, providing a clear view of the data collected from 250 respondents of diverse age range. This age distribution indicates a strong representation of young adults and a smaller but still significant presence of older adults and minors. In terms of location, majority of the respondents resided in urban areas and few both in rural and semi-urbans areas. The responses point to the fact that younger girls have very limited access to internet enabled devices, especially in the rural areas. According to a global report on girls' access to mobile phones, only 37% of adolescent girls have access to mobile phones compared to 77% of adolescent boys. However, even with older women a UN report on the digital divide in Nigeria notes that issues of affordability and family approval translate to less women having access to internet enabled devices in comparison to men. This digital divide is also caused by societal restraints where it is assumed that only "spoilt" girls have access to mobile phones.

Table 2: Access to technology.

Question	Response Option	Percentage
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Devices for language learning.	Smartphone	80%
	Tablet	25%
	Laptop/Computer	65%
	Basic mobile phone	10%
	None	5%
Internet Access	Always	45%
	Often	35%
	Occasionally	15%
	Rarely	7%
	Never	3%
Digital Literacy	Excellent	20%
	Good	35%
	Average	30%
	Below average	10%
	Poor	5%

Findings showed that despite the potential of technology in the world today, significant barriers still persist especially in remote areas like poor connectivity, cultural diversity and lack of access to digital devices. While those in urban and sub-urban towns were able to significantly access the internet due to better connectivity, those in the rural areas had less access due to poor connectivity issues. Poor connectivity issues would naturally mean less information on available digital resources for language learning which would result to better economic prospects. Of those who make use of digital resources to learn French language (or any other language), mobile applications rank highest on their preferred medium of learning. This result shows that more women have access to mobile devices than other internet enabled devices. The portability of mobile devices makes them more popular with those who want to learn languages.

Technology enhanced language learning can expand access to quality education, particularly for marginalized group in the society and women are the majority of this

marginalized group in the society and that is why Dr Uduigwomen said “educating a woman empowers community, a nation”. Warschauer (2004) said “the digital divide remains a major obstacle, with millions of women and girls in low-income communities lacking access to digital devices, reliable internet, and basic digital literacy skills. Warschauer (2018) stress the digital divide, where access to technology and internet remains unequal, limiting the benefits for women in remote areas. Women and girls in urban areas have more access to language learning digital technologies and have more opportunities, are better equipped to advocate for themselves, engage with institution and contribute to their communities unlike women and girls in communities where gender norms restrict women’s access to education but language learning can provide an alternative route for empowerment.

Table 3: Language Learning Experience.

Question	Response Option	Percentage
Language currently Learning	English	60%
	French	15%
	Spanish	10%
	Local language	10%
	Other	5%
Digital tools / Platforms used	Mobile apps	70%
	Online courses	40%
	Virtual classrooms	25%
	Social media	20%
	Other	5%
Time spent on language per week.	Less than 2hours	15%
	2-4 hours	30%
	5-7 hours	25%
	8-10hours	15%

Challenges encountered	More than 10 hours	15%
	Poor internet connectivity.	20%
	Lack of digital devices.	10%
	Difficulty understanding the content.	25%
	Lack of motivation or support	15%
	Cultural barriers	10%
	Other	20%

The responses of respondents points to the fact that more women learn English language online than the French language. Despite having the potentials to provide better economic prospects especially as it relates to Nigeria's closest neighbours, many girls and women have not really placed premium attention on learning the French language online. This could also be due to limited awareness on the economic potentials of learning the French language in a nation like Nigeria. Challenges such as poor connectivity, and inability to understand the content of teaching hinder many from seeing their language learning journey through. Although this research does not look into the percentage who complete the language learning courses online, it is assumed that these challenges will greatly impede the progress of women and girls who are able to complete their language learning lessons especially for a language like French language.

Benefits of adopting digital resources for French language learning

An awareness of the benefits inherent in adopting digital resources for learning languages will go a long way in encouraging more use of said resources for language acquisition. The benefits accrue to both teachers and students alike. Some of the benefits include

- Opportunities to use language skills in real life scenarios.

- Continuous learning that is not restricted by time or place.
- Developed language skills for communication and socialisation
- Better economic prospects due the ability to speak more languages

Recommendation

Research still need to be done on the number of women and girls that learn the French language using digital resources and what percentage succeed in completing the course. This will help to develop targeted language learning programmes while putting into consideration the specific challenges that women and girls face. However, it is recommended that to enhance language learning experiences and outcomes, digital literacy training programs should be targeted towards women and girls in marginalised areas. Improved access to technology and affordable internet plans would also greatly encourage more girls and women to make use of the myriad of resources available online. French language teachers should also collaborate with experts in ICT to develop user-friendly mobile apps for language learning bearing in mind cultural uniqueness. Additionally, tailoring language learning programs to specific occupations and age groups, offering empowerment workshops and providing guidance on effective time management can also be beneficial.

Conclusion

The integration of technology into language education offers unprecedented opportunities to empower women and girls but it also presents challenges that require comprehensive solutions. By addressing the digital divide, fostering culturally relevant content and promoting cross-sector partnerships, stakeholders can unlock the full potential of language learning as a tool for gender equality. Empowering women and girls through language education requires coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders including governments, NGOs, private enterprises and international organizations. Policy framework must prioritize equitable access to digital resources, good network, promote gender-sensitive design in educational technologies and invest in digital literacy training for the marginalized women and girls, enabling them to achieve greater autonomy, economic independence and participation in society.

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