The Internet and Plagiarism on Undergraduates' Reading and Writing Proficiency

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Abstract
This study investigated effects of unguided use of the internet on undergraduates' reading and writing skills in English. The study premised on Krashen's monitor theory that human beings learn language without instruction or feedback on error but with motivation. Aresearcher designed questionnaire was administered to ascertain undergraduates' reasons for using the internet. Two hundred undergraduates of the faculty of arts were randomly selected from two private and two federal universities in South West Nigeria. Their research projects constituted the data for the study. The projects were subjected to Turnitin to assess originality. Results revealed that students plagiarised verbatim from the internet and other texts as shown by Turnitin. Responses to the questionnaire revealed that students used the internet mostly for social and not for learning purposes. It was recommended that teachers and students need proper orientation on the correct use and management of information from the internet for academic purposes.

Keywords: English as a second language, reading and writing skills, internet, plagiarism

1.1 Introduction

The use of the internet to teach and learn English in Nigerian tertiary institutions by teachers and students has been on for a few decades and this gives enough time for examining its effect on students' proficiency in reading and writing. Since language teaching is influenced by the fields of linguistics and psychology and, by extension, second language teaching methods are closely related to concepts and theories about the ways in which humans learn in general, along with the ways in which linguists define language (Lavadenz, 2011), then English as a second language learner (ESL) students need a variety of language experiences. They need to hear the target language, write it, speak it and read it as often as possible with enough motivation. Ybara & Green(2003)believed that computers (internet) can play an integral part in providing ESL students with valuable language experiences as they learn a new language.

Nigerian universitiesin recent times could be assumed to have witnessed a progressive academic experiencesince the internet now plays a significant role. It is not uncommon to see students carrying personal laptops everywhere in campuses and one is quick to believe that they all have access to the internet, a good educational resource which is expected to enhance their performance especially in reading and writing. However, a perfunctory observation of students' performance in the areas of reading (searching and eliciting relevant information from the internet) and writing (manipulating and reproducing information logically from the internet) shows that much is lacking. A simpledepiction of this is seen in students' project

writing where they are required to pick and research on relevant topics and then report their findings. Research writing at the undergraduate level focuses on the rudiments of research development as well as building students' reading and writing competenciesin the English language.Since the library and the internet are the major primary sources fortheir data gathering, the internet therefore, can actually be regarded as an effective teaching tool to develop undergraduates' reading and writing competences if used judiciously.

However, the challenge here is that with the availability of and easy access to the internet,students seem not to be making judicious use of this tool because they are unaware of the internet as a learning enhancement tool. This paper therefore from four selected universities,investigates200 undergraduates' use of the internet and its influence on their reading and writing proficiency by analysing their projects with computer software called Turnitin.

Theoretical framework

This study premises its framework on Krashen's (1982) monitor theory which focuses on second language acquisition and shares a number of assumptions with the Chomskyan Universal Grammar (UG). This theory assumes that language is normally produced using our acquired linguistic competence (L1) and that the conscious learning of the L2 is at the basis of L1 functioning as a monitor or editor which in other words, means self-correction. It also posits that L2 learning occurs just like L1 learning as a result of exposure to meaningful and varied linguistic input which helps the learner's competence development. Motivation according to Krashen is crucial to learning the L2, therefore, the learner must be naturally motivated intrinsically or/and extrinsically to learn the language. Krashen summarises this theory in five hypotheses: the acquisition/learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis.

Although this theory is criticised on the ground that the five hypotheses are vague and difficult to investigate empirically (Spada & Lightbown 2002),this study underscores the fact that the learner must be intrinsically and or extrinsically motivated and thus regards the internet as a form of incentive/motivation to enhance the learning and teaching of writing and reading skills in English to the learner.

1.2   The internet as a resource for teaching reading and writing

The internet, no doubt, has many advantages for both language learners and teachers. Over the years, lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions have benefitted from the internet which is considered as a most efficient teaching tool. Students have been constantly referred to this resource for assignments and practical learning (Puteh, 2002). McManus (2005) identifies seven advantages provided by the internet for language learning in which she terms her first point of benefit as the 5c's:

(a) *Communication* throughout the world at both asynchronous and synchronous levels at little or no cost; easy accessibility to information of other *cultures*; ability to *compare* between target language and the LI; rich resource for *community* building outside the school environment; availability of useful information on the target language for *connections* to many other topics.

(b) Users are motivated as they have enough time on tasks and then enjoy a kind of fulfilment.

(c) There is ready provision of resources for learning and access to many primary sources, archival materials, databases to enhance original research.

(d) Users have control over time, place and pace of learning.

(e) Users also have the advantage of interactivity where the opportunity to synthesize information or comment on or contribute to issues abound.

(f) There is a vast opportunity for students to write and publish their works for a worldwide audience.

(g) There is room to update write ups at any time.

These benefits, if recognised and practised as stated willcertainly improve learners' reading and writing skills. In order to maximize the advantages of the internet as a teaching/learning tool, teachers and students need to understand that not all available resources are relevant to teaching the target language which is English in this case. It is also important for teachers and learners to understand that these resources are there to be employed to create new strategies, aid new ideas and also engage students in more interesting method other than the teacher/student activity in the class. Teachers must be aware of the fact that these resources on the internet are to be usedasexperiments and be applied where appropriate (Graus, 1999). Such internet resourceshould lead them to discovernew ideas and methods to improve their teaching (Frizler, 1995).

Specifically, '*One Stop English'*an English teaching programme on the internet recommends some internet-based writing activities for teachers' use at all levels ranging from 'Personalized storybooks' for children to such advanced writing activities as 'E-mail message's where students are asked to send e-mails to their pen-pals, friends and lecturers; 'Interest groups'- where students are encouraged to join special interest groups in order to communicate with people of the same interests and hobbies; 'Participating in international projects' such as the International Writing Exchange (IWE) courses – here students will have the opportunity of studying English and exchanging ideas on general and controversial topics with native speakers across the globe; and 'Culture capsules' – here, students are required to link up with their colleagues from different other countries and create a web page through which descriptions of significant personalities, people, places and processes from each student's country are written and exchanged (http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/grammar...).

Finally, it is imperative for both teachers and learners to appreciate that available information on the internet is not to be copied as ones' own idea. Tefera & Kinde (2009) term this act asacademic dishonesty (plagiarism), an offence which attracts serious penalties. In order to avoid this on the part of teachers and students, they advise that institutions of learning should "strive to establish an academic integrity culture, which is characterized by mutual respect between students and faculty members… and encouraging students to behave honestly…"

The internet provides room for users to communicate asynchronously and synchronously. In the light of this, Puteh(2002) submits that "the internet offers a range of authentic materials and ample opportunities to communicate in the foreign language". Undergraduates are fond of chatting, pinging, twitting, blogging, and e-mailing friends and relatives across the globe (synchronous activities). Most times, assignments are given and returned through the internet and with the availability of the virtual library in some of the selected universities; in other words,it is assumed that students should be able to carry out thorough research.

It is therefore significant to emphasize Mcmanus (2005) advice here that:

knowing how to locate information on the web is a crucial skill that everyone should possess, not only for academic and professional success, but also for many facets of daily living. It is very important that students be taught how to search effectively and how to evaluate web sites when found.

Unfortunately, many university lecturers and studentsare not conscious of this fact that the internet is a teaching tool that could boost reading and writing skills if it is employed as such. Frizler (1995) laments that many lecturers lack focus on internet application in language teaching and as such they cannot benefit from the abundance of information available on the internet. Puteh(2002) further explains that some lecturers are quite interested in using the internet for teaching but cannot. The reason for this according to her may be because they do not know where to start from or have an erroneous belief that its use is limited to certain courses.

In the teaching and learning of any language, the reading and listening skills represent the receptive expertise while writing and speaking form the productive ability inthe language learning process.At the

secondary school level,it is anticipated that students will havebeen taught the basic skills of the English language in receptive communication, i.e. ability to comprehend, to assimilate and to recall (reading) and in productive communication (writing). But, at the undergraduate stage, the student is expected to show higher level of proficiency in the two skills as individual research and personal intensive study are required. Most importantly, students at this level should display advanced ability for extensive reading and extracting vital information from write-ups. In addition, expressing extracted relevant information in student's own words in line with his/her thought determines a proficient reader and writer.

The internet is a good resource that could be used to build and develop these important skills. Good enough, many undergraduates have easy access to the internet because a good number of them have personal laptops.For instance, the internet provides easy use of the dictionary to understand new and difficult words when reading through articles. This is where the teacher gets involved in the judicious use of the internet. When lectures and assignments are prepared by the lecturer, articles and information from the net must be summarised and applied. For instance, students could be led to a site to read and then come to class to retell what has been read. They could be asked to write on given topics which would be published on the net for their friends' and general public's (global) reactions. It could be a form of debate where the class is grouped into two or more groups and different relevant sites given to research the topics for debate. The process of research here will require students to read and understand in order to bring out relevant points for the debate. On the other hand, the lecturer could prepare some comprehension questions and then ask students after they might have read some articles. Such activities like these train students towards conducting thorough individual research such as research projects with little supervision.

In the light of the above discussion, Mrayyan (2004) opines that the internet has assumed "a heightened role in education and research because internet linkages foster and increase national and international collaboration. In addition, students' use of the internet is both cost-effective and efficient. The most essential thing here is that lecturers must be aware of the internet as an educational tool for teaching language skills.

The implication is that teachers must get more intimate with the internet to enhance and make teaching and learning productive and interesting. The internet is replete with a wealth of interestingESL teaching lessons on grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening. When students get exposed to suchreading and writing tasks on the net, reading and writing become meaningful and enjoyable. Puteh (2002) advises that lecturers need to be aware of their responsibility "in the digital age which is to communicate to students the ideas and skills necessary to function well in English learning". Therefore, it is imperative for lecturers to assist students to research and collect information and data from the internet and direct them to relevant sites specifically related to language teaching and learning.

McKenzie (1998) however believes that the internet has made the process of copying very easy for students as they discover and save large amounts of information from different sources with little reading and originality. In support of this view, Hricko (2007) asserts that the more students use the internet for research, the higher the rate of plagiarism increases.

1.3   Internet and Plagiarism

The widespread accessibility of undergraduates to the internet and its resources has increased the level at which students plagiarize. Billic-Zule et al (2005) reports that 91% of medical students in Croatia used in a study plagiarized. Also, in the United Kingdom, Furedi (2003) in a study identifies large increase in plagiarism.

Herberling (2002) asserts that the internet has made it easy for students to cut and paste lengthy passages from multiple internet sources and then merge them for term papers leaving students lazy and careless, less concerned for originality and clarity of their own ideas. According to Barchson-Arbib & Yarib (2004)

students equally copy from both prints and internet sources.In confirmation, results of a study carried out by Adeleke, Durodolu & Adekanye (2011) reveal that there was a "heavy incidence of both text-based and internet-based plagiarism among students of the University of Lagos, acknowledged either by self-report or perception by others".

McMurtry (2003) demonstrates three common ways in which undergraduates plagiarise from the internet: (a) the easiest of the three is by locating relevant websites through a search engine then copying appropriate texts and pasting them in essays. (b) through e-mails or internet forum, already prepared papers could be received from friends and colleagues from other schools. (c) locating "sites that collect and distribute papers on the web either free or for a fee". The inference from these assertions is that it is pertinent for lecturers to teach and encourage undergraduates on the importance of acknowledging and citing authors whose ideas were used. In addition, they must be conscious of penalties for plagiarism.

This study assessed how much of public and private undergraduates' reading and writing skills are influenced and developed through the use of internet in research writing.

2.0   Methodology

This research employed a computer software called Turnitin to analyse the project reports of 200 undergraduates from the faculties of art randomly selected from two private universities (Private UniversitiesA & B50undergraduates each - 100) and two federal universities (Federal Universities A & B50 undergraduates each - 100)in south-west Nigeria. Undergraduates from the faculties of art in the four selected universities were used for the study because the expertise of proficient reading and writing skills are most needed here. Turnitin is a software programme designed to identify and prevent plagiarism. It also improves students' writing cycle and provides feedback to students.

Also, a researcher designed questionnaire was administered on the selected students to ascertain what they love doing on the internet and their opinion on whether it helps or not in the development of their reading and writing skills.

3.0   Data Analysis

Undergraduates' project reports constituted the data for this study. Students' projects were run through Turnitin to indicate the level of originality and also to show sources from where information or texts were copied. Responses from the questionnaire were elicited using frequency counts and simple percentage.

In addition, students' projects were also examined and scored based on the following designed scoring plan:

Grasp of topic (10 marks)

Attention was given to how content reflects the topic or how well the content explained the topic. Thus, scoring was based on the scale of: Excellently reflected (10); well reflected (8); fairly reflected (6); poorly reflected (4) and not reflected (2).

Language use (i.e. general proficiency with respect to grammar, spelling, lexis, precision etc. (30 marks)

Scoring for grammar was based on 10 marks. Any error detected in tense use and structural constructions got 1 mark deducted from the 10 marks. The same procedure was used for spelling (10 marks) and appropriate choice of lexis (10 marks).

Logicality and clarity of ideas (30 marks)

Logicality entails ability to express relevant ideas with coherence and clarity. Each idea expressed clearly and logically in important sections of the project such as background to the study, statement of the problem, discussion, conclusion and recommendation is scored1 mark.

Style (i.e. synthetic balance, paragraph, etc. 15 marks)

Style involves the skilful use of cohesive ties to ensure synthetic balance throughout the project. The arrangement of paragraphs to present ideas syntheticallywas identified and scored accordingly. Scoring was done on the scale of Excellent (15), Very Good (12), Good (10), Fair (8), Poor (6), Very Poor (4).

Originality and contribution to current scholarship (5 marks)

Here, originality means that students exhibit their creativity and do not plagiarise by copying verbatim other peoples' works or not quoting without citing the author. With the help of Turnitin, level of plagiarism was detected to determine originality. Contribution to scholarship is awarded 5 marks on the scale of: Very topical (5 marks); fairly topical (4 marks); topical (3 marks); not topical (2 marks).

4.0   Results

Responses from the questionnaire revealed that 24.5% (90 undergraduates) of the sample used the internet mostly for social browsing, 20% (80 undergraduates) used the internet for both academic and social purposes, and 7.5% (30 undergraduates) were using it to improve their language proficiency.While 35.5% (115 undergraduates) believe that the internet use can enhance their reading and writing skills if properly guided, 15.5% (85) did not know how and were not sure if the internet could improve their reading and writing proficiency.

Scored results of undergraduates from the four universities used in the study are presented in tables for easy reading.

From Table 1, it is gathered that 15 out of 50 undergraduates did not understand their topics as they scored 4 out of 10. This reflected in originality in which they scored 6 out of 15 as they were less creative in their project writing. In all, they scored 41%. In contrast, 10 undergraduates out of 50 scored 6 over 10 in grasp of topic which influenced how ideas were logically presented with skilful use of language.

Table 2 reveals the performance of private university B undergraduates. While 23 students scored 5 out of 10 in grasp of topic which indicated that they had some understanding of the topic, performance in language use, logicality & clarity of ideas, style, and originality was remarkably poor. In all, they scored as low as 35%. On the other hand, 12 undergraduates who scored 7 out of 10 in grasp of topic performed excellently in language use and in the other aspects of analysis. In all, this group scored 67%.

Table3 reveals the performance of one of the selected public university undergraduates. 15 of them scored 8 out of ten in grasp of topic and they performed excellently well in language use, logicality of ideas, originality and style. They recorded as high as 68% in all. In comparison, 13 undergraduates scored 4 over 10 in grasp of topic and 40% in all.

Table 4 indicates that 11 public undergraduates scored 5 over 10 in grasp of topic and performed a little below average in all other parameters used for the analysis. In all, they scored 41%.

In summary, a comparative analysis of the four reports showed that a total of 29 undergraduates in the two Federal Universities sampled scored between 66% and 68% while 39 undergraduates scored between 50% and 55%;and 24 undergraduates scored between 40% and 41%. For the two sampled private universities, while 22undergraduates scored between 64% and 67%, 37 undergraduates scored between 52% and 54% and lastly, a total of 41 undergraduates scored between 35% and 43%.

Turnitin reports revealed that similarities of between 60% -26% occurred in almost all the projects as areas of similarities of the project with original works were highlighted. Sites from which works were copied and cited included the following: Wikipedia, answers.yahoo.com, antiessays.com, archive.org, ask.com, Britannica.com, dictionary.reference.com, encyclopedia.com, essaymania.com etc.

5.0   Discussions

Theuse of the internet for teaching and learning has been abused by some undergraduates as revealed by the study. This could be as a result of the erroneous belief that the internet is a public domain and therefore, information on the internet is nobody's property and so could be used without due acknowledgements (Thompson, 2003). Resultsaccording to Turnitin, revealed that many students actually cut and pasted articles from the internet without acknowledging sources, and this corroborated Herberling's (2002) assertion. Parameters used for analysis are discussed one after the other accordingly:

Grasp of topic

74 respondents from the two federal universities and 36respondents from the private universities scored between 6 and 8 over 10. This showed that majority of the undergraduates who comprehended the topic of research came from the federal university. Understanding the topic influenced undergraduates' performance in other aspects positively. Since many of the federal universities' undergraduates did not possess personal laptops on which they could spend as much time as desired, they probably took time to understand and work on their topics. Moreover, understanding ones topic stimulates the thought process and helps to generate more ideas. Hence, the fact that private university undergraduates had free access to the internet and all had their personal laptops may have indulged them in spending lesser time on comprehending their topics. On the other hand, they might have been engaged in other internet activities other than academics.

Language use (i.e. general proficiency with respect to grammar, spelling, lexis, precision etc.)

The fact that majority of the respondents are vast in sending e-mails, chat, ping and blog did not reflect in their general proficiency with respect to grammar, spelling, lexis and precision. If they could not express their own ideas in their own words, but copied and pasted from internet sources, then language teachers need to modify their method of teaching grammar and spelling using the avenue of sending e-mails, chatting, pinging and blogging to develop students' writing proficiency.

Logicality and clarity of ideas

There was no clarity of ideas as a result of undergraduates' lack of understanding of their topics in some of the undergraduates' projects. Apparently, undergraduates did not read through articles and passages comprehensively before cutting and pasting into their essays. As a result, they did not present ideas systematically and information from sources was not relevant to their topics. In other words, they were unable to sieve relevant information from the available materials at hand therefore they copied the whole paragraph or passage verbatim into their own essays.Lack of comprehension in reading and creative writing is evident here.

Style (i.e. synthetic balance, paragraph, etc)

Some of the respondents did not understand their topics and could not comprehend information from sources consulted.There was no synthetic balance in their write ups. Many of them apparently did not read through the whole project to ascertain consistency in the flow of ideas. It is when one expresses his or her own thoughts and ideas that style is reflected. But in this situation where undergraduates copied other peoples' ideas, it was difficult to identify individual undergraduate's styles in their projects.However, some undergraduates exhibited splendid coherence in their writing which reflected competence.

Originality and contribution to current scholarship

The main reason of carrying out a research is to be able to contribute to scholarship. Results showed that some undergraduates were not aware of this fact. They would have been more original in their write-ups than to copy and paste others ideas. This also has to do with undergraduates' ability to comprehend the topic from the start. While some research projects were illuminating and quite interesting, some did not contribute new information to scholarship.

English language teachers in tertiary institutions should not take so much for granted as far as reading and writing competencies of undergraduates are concerned. The evidence of being university graduates lies in their ability to read and write proficiently. Since we are in the technology era where youths are deeply involved, teachers should seize the opportunity of the internet to develop these important skills in them. As illustrated earlier, the internet with relevant computersoftware can help English language learners develop vocabulary and writing skills. Lewis (1997) recommended that composition for beginners should be a guided activity so students do not become frustrated. Writing long essays in a language that is still somewhat unfamiliar to students can be difficult and the internet with the wealth of information available may become very complex. Hence, the need for guidance is very necessary. Lewis therefore suggested the use of graphics and clip artsto help students convey their thoughts more clearly and the writing exercise on the computer much more enjoyable.

5.0   Conclusion

English language teachers need to wake up and make judicious use of the internet as a tool to teach reading and writing skills at the tertiary level. It makes teaching and learning much easier and enjoyable. Since undergraduates are deeply involved in internet activities and it is apparent from their responses that they are not aware of the pedagogy use of the internet, lecturers should manipulate this potential productively to develop and improve students' reading and writing skills. According to Liaw (1997), teachers should offer English language learners a language-rich environment in which students are constantly engaged in language activities.He suggested the use of computer books by teachers to aid students' reading.These computer books according to him are interactive stories that appear on the computer screen as an actual book with text and illustrations. There are also a variety of interactive choices students can use to read the story, including: real voices that read aloud, music, and sound effects. The story text is also highlighted so readers can follow.On the improvement of learners' vocabulary, Constantinescu(2007) advised thatfocus should be placed on the utilization of electronic dictionaries designed specifically for English language learners. These dictionaries have several built-in functions and tools that are not provided in book dictionaries.Invariably, this implies that lecturers must be computer literate and be internet friendly in order to use the computer as a teaching tool effectively.

It is very important that both lecturers and students appreciate other people's ideas and then acknowledge such when cited. Undergraduates must be taught citation methods and correct ways of doing this especially in research writing. Lecturers need to encourage students to read and understand information in order to sieve relevant from irrelevant messages.They must focus on developing communication skills among undergraduates by encouraging them to participate in communicative activities available on the internet such as email, chat rooms, on-line discussions, posting write ups on the internet and editing on the internet.According to Kenworthy(2004),the internet is certainly a modern technological method for learners to develop their English language skills. He commented that there are many Internet web sites prepared solely to enhance the reading abilities of English language learners. There are also a massiveamount of resources available in the form of newspapers, magazines, journals, electronic libraries, dictionaries,

encyclopaedias, and newsletters. Browsing these resources and sites according to him will obviously enhance the learner's vocabulary and reading ability.

Ability to do this will discourage plagiarism and encourage the presentation of original, logical and clear ideas on the part of the undergraduates. It is recommended that to discourage plagiarism among students and teachers as well, academic rules and regulations as well as penalties/sanctions on plagiarism must be well communicated to undergraduates as results from Adeleke et al (2009) reveal that 75% of students in the study were oblivious of any penalty for any type of plagiarism. This will ultimately help higher institutions in graduating students who are "shaped not only academically but also morally" (Brimble& Stevenson-Clarke, 2005).

It is recommended that further studies could investigate tertiary institutions' teachers' use of the internet to teach language courses in Nigeria.

Tables

Table 1: Private University 'A' Undergraduates' Performance

Number of Students	Grasp of Topic (10 marks)	Language Use (30 marks)	Logicality& Clarity of Ideas (30 marks)	Style (15 marks)	Originality (15 marks)	%
10	06	18	18	12	12	64%
12	05	16	16	08	07	52%
13	05	12	12	07	07	43%
15	04	12	12	07	06	41%
50						

Table 2: Private University 'B' Undergraduates' Performance

Number of Students	Grasp of Topic (10 marks)	Language Use (30 marks)	Logicality& Clarity of Ideas (30 marks)	Style (15 marks)	Originality (15 marks)	%
12	07	20	20	10	10	67%
15	06	16	16	08	08	54%
10	05	12	12	07	07	53%
13	05	10	10	05	05	35%
50						

Table 3: Federal University 'A' Undergraduates' Performance

Number of Students	Grasp of Topic (10 marks)	Language Use (30 marks)	Logicality& Clarity of Ideas (30 marks)	Style (15 marks)	Originality (15 marks)	%
15	08	20	20	10	10	68%
15	06	16	16	09	08	55%
12	05	15	15	08	07	50%
13	04	12	12	06	06	40%
50						

Table 4: Federal University 'B' Undergraduates' Performance

Number of Students	Grasp of Topic (10 marks)	Language Use (30 marks)	Logicality& Clarity of Ideas (30 marks)	Style (15 marks)	Originality (15 marks)	%
14	08	18	20	10	10	66%
13	07	18	18	09	09	61%
12	06	15	16	08	08	53%
11	05	12	12	06	06	41%
50						

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