AISEE
The Association of Indonesian
Scholars of English Education

EFFECTIVENESS OF DEPLOYING WHATSAPP AND FLASH FICTION IN COMPREHENSION AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

Adekunle Mamudu
Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
E-mail: kunlemamudu@yahoo.com

Abstract: Many universities in Nigeria are yet to embrace technology for pedagogy through the use of modern learning gadgets to enhance learning activities in their campuses. Such modern gadgets include the Global system of Mobile Communication (GSM). In every campus in the country, virtually every student owns a phone and can, thus, participate in at least a two-way communication between the teacher and the learner. Interviews conducted on the poor utilisation of this gadget in schools show that lecturers believe it is highly informal and would, therefore, reduce the seriousness and effectiveness of learning if deployed in and outside the classroom. This study sets out to allay all such fears and convince school administrators that these fears are unfounded. In this research, it was found that rather than weaken the seriousness of learning, it would help the students give their best as they use their regular familiar and endearing phones to respond to their lecturers, while finding the opportunity to quickly consult other language learning-aided packages in their phones. To be specific, this paper examines students' responses to the use of WhatsApp and flash fiction in the teaching of literary comprehension and appreciation in English Language to learners of English as a second language.
Keywords: *Flash fiction, WhatsApp, Technology, ICT, English Language Learners*

INTRODUCTION

Today's world has become technologically driven in all ramifications. Education as a large industry cannot be exempted from this embrace. In Nigeria, however, there is a very slow realisation and acceptance of this new dawn, this new way of getting things done in our universities. In and out of classroom learning remains in the conservative claws of the traditional methods of learning. The result of this is isolation, where stake-holders cannot effectively perform in accordance with the requirement of the new techniques and methods when faced with their counterparts from technology-embracing parts of the world. In learning English, the teaching of comprehension skills is very crucial, and it occupies a prominent place in the course outline. This is because the possession of comprehension skills enables optimum performance in the language as a second language. Almost all students have learnt the use of the mobile phone as a device, and more attractive to this study is their mastery of, and delight in the use of the effective communicative precision of WhatsApp. According to Wikipedia (2016), WhatsApp Messenger is a freeware, cross-platform and end-to-end encrypted instant messaging application for smart-phones.

The availability of this portable device to a large number of students, and the almost limitless possibilities in learning, endear it to the teaching and learning of English comprehension skills in the university. The fact that it is inter-active and can post a common text, in

this case, flash fiction, explains the suitability of the medium as an interesting meeting ground for learning activities.

Flash fiction, on the other hand, is an emerging prose form that emphasises extreme brevity, compactness and relevance. Its dwelling place is essentially the social media, where it is drawing a rather large audience. There are divisions among writers as to the exact length of this new genre of prose fiction, but the average word length has been put at under two thousand words.

Flash fiction is a shorter brother of the short story. In these days of the social media, where everyone has access to a hand-held device that enables quick communication and easy access to virtually every nook and cranny of the world, the need for sharing common experiences and observations that shape our lives has given birth to a type of narrative, so short in its rendition that it is named flash fiction. Some critics believe that the name is taken from the impact that moving light makes on a shinning surface like a pan. Its impact is loud and blindingly bright, but it has only a very short lifespan. It is one way everybody tells their story of significance, yet it is also an avenue for practised writers to share their stories with the world. Flash fiction is well adapted to various applications of the social media, but it seems to be very effective on WhatsApp. As a younger and shorter brother of the short story, flash fiction enjoys most features of the short story. Its operational space is smaller and it must, therefore, choose a smaller area or object of focus and deplore a very tight narrative framework, thus endearing itself much more to the art of poetry. As a piece of fiction, with the quality of poetry, it lends itself to good use as a good learning and teaching text arising from its compact wholeness.

The suitability of flash fiction for this study is stemmed on the fact that though brief, the form presents in every episode, a complete story contained within itself. This, therefore, makes it more comprehensible to the learner-reader. It provides the needed elements of text appreciation and comprehension. As a literary text, characterisation, plot, setting, theme, point of view, and language are completely provided and examinable. This is as against the use of extracts, excerpts, and summaries of longer materials. To this end, an attempt to teach literary comprehension in English using WhatsApp guarantees a better delivery and comprehension as the students have a personal access to the text through their phones which they cherish very much.

Many researchers have looked at the new media and its suitability for use in enhancing effective learning. One of such is the work of Murugan and Sai (2016). In their work, they extol the qualities of the mobile phone and its many adaptable applications as an effective learning tool, as a technological breakthrough that should be embraced as its benefits are multifaceted. Their research findings are that the mobile phone is a blessing to the teacher and L2 learner of English.

Another researcher, Manan (2016), writes specifically on the use of WhatsApp. Manan observes that students find the use of WhatsApp very attractive and as a result, it should be put to serious academic use, especially for the learning of English Language among foreign speakers. He found that WhatsApp provides fun and relaxation to students, as well as shielding them from face to face communication with their teacher, whom they might be shy to speak to. Besides, the tool is capable of providing the enabling environment to enrich the vocabulary of learners.

AISEE
The Association of Indonesian
Scholars of English Education

METHOD

The experiment method which involves the direct observation of the students' behaviour was deployed in this research. An experiment is a research design in which the researcher manipulates or varies an independent variable in a controlled setting in order to observe or measure the impact of the variation or manipulation on another variable called the dependent variable (Yomere & Agbonifoh1999, p. 43). As an experiment, the research was designed to accommodate the observation and manipulation of a class of fifty students and their reactions to literary appreciation and comprehension learning over six weeks using selected flash fiction stories. As the second step, survey design was adopted. The essence of this was to find out from the students if the procedure had imparted on their use of language generally and to obtain information for their behaviour by using questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to know the reasons for their choices, preferences, and other behaviours.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were six meetings, during which six pieces of flash fiction were learnt. The population of the class was 50, but attendance varied from class to class in the physical presence of the students. However, the number remains constant for the WhatsApp meetings since the population of the platform on WhatsApp remained 50. But, attendance was marked by each student's phone indicating whether they were online or not. Responses from the students included contributions to the discussion as well as questions that required answers from the lecturer. Assignments were regularly given to the students to be submitted on paper or posted on WhatsApp on alternate weeks. The summary of the study is shown in the table below.

Table 1. *A summary of students levels of participation*

Meeting	Story Studied	Attendance	Responses / Questions	Medium	Assignments
First meeting	"Mannahatta" by John Keene	46	10	White Board	32
Second meeting	"A Man Without Shoes" by Per Petterson	50	42	WhatsApp	46
Third meeting	"Tweet" by Sabrina Orah Mark	47	12	White Board	20
Fourth meeting	"If She Were To Lay Down" by Molia Dumbleton	50	40	WhatsApp	38
Fifth meeting	"Forty-Four Goats" by Simon Harris	48	18	White Board	25
Sixth meeting	"Before the Storm" by Alex Sheal.	50	46	WhatsApp	47

The results obtained from the experiment as tabulated, it can be seen that in the first meeting, the story "Mannahatta" by John Keene was studied in the classroom with 46 students in attendance. This first

meeting was the traditional classroom meeting where the chalk board and the regular methods of teaching were deployed. As usual, the teacher stood in front of the class like a boss, directing and dictating the procedures in the class. Students were expected to conform in obedience to the general school regulations. The learning atmosphere looked quite tensed and as expected, officious. The students restricted themselves only to the story under appreciation and had no time to check their spellings, tenses, reading and writing skills as it was not built into the lecture for the day. The total responses from them was 10, consisting of 2 questions and 8 responses. The 2 responses were offered by the same student who was very active in the class. The 8 contributions came from 8 students as appointed by the lecturer when contributions were not forth coming. 32 students responded by submitting their assignments for this lecture in the next class.

But, in the second meeting, where WhatsApp was deployed, there was a marked difference in student participation. Here, Per Petterson's "A Man Without Shoes" was studied. The WhatsApp platform indicated a total presence of 50 students as being online. Out of this, 42 students posted comments and responses to the questions that were asked. They, in turn asked questions freely. It was observed, however, that some of the students delayed in responding to the questions they were asked. At the end of the class, an assignment was posted for the students to do and revert to the lecturer through the same medium. Surprisingly, 42 students posted their assignments back to the lecturer's box.

In the third meeting, the class discusses the story entitled "Tweet" by Sebrina Mark. A total of 47 students were in attendance. The white Board

medium was used for the lecture. Out of this, there were a total number of 12 responses for both questions and direct contributions. Of the assignment given, 20 students submitted their hand-written assignments.

In the fourth meeting, the platform remained 50, but only 46 students were online for the lecture. Of this, there were 40 responses by way of questions and discussion of the story which ranged from vocabulary, meaning, character interpretation, and literary devices. There were 38 turned in assignments for the fourth meeting.

The fifth meeting, alternately, was a classroom lecture conducted through the traditional learning aid of the white board. There were 48 students in the class and 18 responses all together, including questions and contributions to the discussion. On the assignment given, only 25 complied by submitting a printed assignment to the lecturer.

Finally, the sixth meeting which was WhatsApp driven had 50 students online. Of this number, the meeting recorded 48 responses and a total submission of take-home assignment compliance of 47.

Our observation from the first two meetings, which represents the two variants of learning methods, indicated that students were getting tired of the traditional method of teaching and learning. The traditional class has become boring and restrictive, especially with the presence of an officious lecturer who does not tolerate side talks, jokes, quick check up of facts from dictionaries, the thesaurus, handbooks and the phone. The students appeared sluggish and unhappy to contribute to the discussion as a result of lack of confidence and a general feeling of incompetence in the English language, which is a second language to them. Their inability to answer questions,

except prompted by the teacher, shows their lack of interest in learning through this restricted method that takes away their confidence. Their refusal to ask questions as well was an indication that the morale was low, despite the interesting story being discussed in class. In the bid to conform to the course requirements and pass the examination, a significant number of the students (32) submitted their assignments to the lecturer. An analysis of the assignments submitted indicated a better performance in the take-home assignment. In the assignments, the students appeared to have taken more time to cross check their spellings and use of grammar unlike the poor syntactic and semantic presentations that were recorded in the class. It was found that students expressed themselves rather freely as against the shyness expressed in the class.

The explanation for this is that outside the classroom and free from that restrictive environment, students were able to express themselves on paper. They were not shy of anybody and were not constrained by the lecturer's bossy approach to learning. It is a fact to be noted that the students also had the opportunity to consult their books and other resources to improve their spellings, rules of syntax, and semantic accuracy before turning their assignments in. It is safe to conclude that classroom learning is restrictive and inhibiting as shown by the behavioural pattern of students in the first classroom experiment especially in an ESL context. The experiment has also revealed that students prefer to submit written assignments to contributing in class in order to avoid being made jest of or in order to avoid the teacher's reprimand. While only nine people spoke in the class, 32 persons submitted their assignments. This large turn in of assignments may however be attributed

to the fear of losing marks, but it could also be a signal that students wish to be left to learn in an environment that is devoid of stress and tension as the classroom provides. They feel more confident when they write their assignments outside the restrictive classroom.

A comparison of the classroom and the WhatsApp session, from the results obtained above, indicates a deeper finding. First, the attendance level is higher for the WhatsApp meeting, indicating a general preference for the medium as an alternative to the chalk board classroom. The WhatsApp class records a near 100% attendance judging by the online indicator on the teacher's phone. Beyond the high level of attendance, is the level of participation of the class. The result shows that 42 responses were recorded in the WhatsApp meeting. This is a great improvement on the 8 contributions that were made in the traditional classroom meeting. The analysis indicates that there were delays in student's responses to questions. This was later found to be the periods used by the students to consult dictionaries, the thesaurus, handbooks, and the internet before posting their responses. Their responses were found to be better and more accurate as against their classroom presentations even when there were only a few responses. Their spellings, concord, syntax and semantics appeared to have improved well over their class performances and the take home assignment.

At the end of the meeting, a take-home assignment was also given to the students to be submitted in the next class. In compliance, 42 students were found to have submitted their assignments to the teachers WhatsApp box. The implication of this is that students are drawn more to their phones and the WhatsApp media seems

to provide fun to them. Using the new media to them appears to create a feeling of relaxation and fun. It takes away the stress of the classroom and the rigours of compliance with the teacher's classroom drills. A noticeable trend, however, was the regularly increasing interest and performance of the students in the WhatsApp classes.

At the third meeting which reverted to the traditional classroom method, there was a slight increase over the first meeting. Out of a total number of 47 students who were present in the class, a total of 12 responses were recorded which is an improvement over the number of responses in the first encounter of 8. It is also possible that the title and content of the story that was studied could have motivated the students to attempt to contribute to the discussion and to ask questions as they deemed fit. This Sebrina Mark's story possesses the quality to attract the students as the title is in a familiar domain—the internet—which students have found very attractive in their daily lives and are in a hurry to take it into the classroom for some serious business. Of the assignment given, 20 students submitted their hand-written assignments in the next meeting as against 32 who submitted in the first class which was also the traditional class. Perhaps, the students had tasted the online submission method and preferred it. They must have felt reluctant to go back to the old method they had been forced to comply with.

The interest of the students continued to grow in the fourth meeting by their compliance with the submission of their assignments. As at the last WhatsApp class, 42 students submitted their assignments as against the 46 students who submitted in the fourth meeting. There were 50 students online when the lecture was ongoing. In the fourth meeting, the platform remained 50, but only 46 students were online for the lecture. Of this, there were 48 responses by way of questions and discussion. The discussion ranged from interpretation, character, new words and meanings, and identification of literary devices. This indicates that the students interest in the new media was sustained even though there was no major change in figures. Generally, it showed their preference for the WhatsApp forum for learning well over the chalk board.

The fifth and sixth meetings become the last experiments on each of the methods provide very interesting results. In the fifth meeting which was a chalk board meeting, there were 48 students in the class out of which 18 students made contributions in the class, while 23 submitted their assignments. A positive response here is that the students' level of contribution in class had risen noticeably over time, from the initial class response of just 8 students, responses grew into 18. It could be safe to say that their confidence levels had been raised very high due to their engagement with the hand-held device. They were becoming bold and their shyness was dropping. They also seemed to have overcome the fear of their lecturer. This fifth meeting was by far, their most productive traditional class. But, in the sixth meeting, it was very clear that their preferred mode of learning is through WhatsApp. There were 50 students online, out of which 46 made contributions and 47 submitted their assignments into the lecturer's WhatsApp box. These figures speak for themselves and would be hard put to deny the obvious. At this point in the experiment, the equilibrium is almost reached, indicating a near 100% indication that WhatsApp remains the preferred option of study to the students.

From the results above, it is quite evident that students prefer learning with the hand-held device of their phone in general, and the WhatsApp platform in particular. From the six meetings, alternately held through the media of the white Board and the WhatsApp, the level of interest and performance by the student is quite clear. The results show that students feel free to contribute to discussions through WhatsApp than through face-to-face discussion in the class. The results also show very clearly that students are more attracted to their assignments if submitted directly to the teacher's textbox than the traditional hand written assignments. It was also found that there were more correct answers posted on WhatsApp than the ones given verbally in the class.

A second step design which was essentially a confirmation study was also conducted. In the confirmation study, many of the students agreed that they were quite shy in the class as they found the classroom quite restrictive. This, they said, prevented them from contributing freely in the class. They said that they were scared of being laughed at by their course mates for making mistakes or for being unable to provide the correct answers to questions asked in the class. Some respondents agreed that the technology provided by WhatsApp enabled them to quickly consult other pages on the internet for explanation and clarification which enabled their understanding of aspects of the stories. In addition to these, students found WhatsApp more attractive for learning because they didn't have to assemble in the classroom all the time. Besides, some of the students agreed that being in possession of their phones provided some measure of confidence as they have grown quite fond of these hand-held learning and pleasure devices.

On the question of if the use of WhatsApp had imparted on their use of the English language comprehension, aside from literary appreciation of flash fiction, the positive response was overwhelming. The respondents agreed that the hand-held device enabled and granted them quick access to other sites and language teaching aiding applications and content that enhanced their quick consultation where adequate assistance was provided. It was found among the students that a general eagerness to learn through the new medium was quite obvious. During the experiment, they looked forward to the WhatsApp classes over the white board meetings. The students cherished their phones and saw them as confidants, trusting in them and the answers they provided. During the WhatsApp meetings, it was found that the students, through their responses, appeared to be different people, with new lives. They contributed freely, without fear or inhibitions. They asked questions at will and reminded everyone on the platform of activities that had earlier taken place on the course.

Our findings agree with the research findings of research earlier conducted in this field by Murugan and Sai (2016), and the studies of Manan (2016), whose paper specifically focused on the use of WhatsApp for learning purposes. The findings showes that WhatsApp and other ICT media, if deployed to learning environments, will enhance academic learning in no small way. All the studies observe that students love their phones and will be very comfortable with them as learning tools. They have mastered their operations and have other learning applications that could help them to do quick check ups on relevant needs while learning. As a hand held device, it individualises technology and becomes a viable tool for the students to learn from

different parts of the world. The findings are, perhaps, a reflection of the global demand by youths and even the elderly for a more learner-friendly environment driven by affordable technology.

CONCLUSION

This research has proven that the neglect of information technology (ICT) for the purpose of teaching and learning in the Nigerian university takes its toll on the students who are denied the benefits of the use of the new media for learning purposes. The results show clearly that students feel free to express themselves through the WhatsApp medium, engage more in take-home assignments, and are able to consult other information pages in the course of carrying out their assignments. This enables them to learn faster and also broaden their academic horizon as well as sharpen their skills in the use of the English, both in literary comprehension and language communication activities. Managements of Nigerian universities should be encouraged to embrace the new media and be at breast with the rest of the technology-driven world. This will benefit the students and the government, as well as the nation in general. Governments through its education managers will do well to replicate this research and upon conviction that students learn better with the new media, in this case, WhatsApp, will need to put in place a programme that will ensure that educational institutions are mobilised to take a step on the next rung of the ladder towards our joining the rest of the word to embrace information communication technology. One wonders why we have continued to tie the education sector to the traditional learning method that has become boring, repetitive, and obsolete.

Furthermore, universities must wake up and drive the country through the embrace of Information Technology to share the new trends in pedagogy with the rest of the now globalised village. Students are willing and waiting for the adoption and deployment of this trend in schools. It is a method that will prove its mettle with time by proving sceptics wrong. The days of the traditional classroom, whiteboard are fast running out as students are acquiring degrees online through the distance learning methods that thrive on Information Technology. That seems to be the future of learning for the world and would require a quick adoption so that no one is left behind by this fast moving train of new teaching and learning aids, driven by technology.

The paper has also debunked the thinking that deploying ICT for pedagogy will encourage truancy in the campuses. If well managed, the use of WhatsApp to teach English generally will enhance the efficiency of both the teacher and the learner. It will provide access to information more quickly, more readily, and more abundantly. By sweeping it under the carpet or dismissing it with a wave of the hand does not lay the issue to rest. What is required is a research determined fact as to whether deploying WhatsApp to the classroom will breed truancy, mediocrity, laziness, all leading to a decline in the quality of education in the country.

REFERENCES

Dumbleton, M. (2014). *If she were to lay down*. Retrieved from: www.kenyonreview.org/kr.

Keene, J. (2013). *Mannahatt*. Retrieved from: www.triquaterly.org/issues-145/manhattan.

Manan, N. A. (2017). Whatsapp mobile tool in second language learning. *Indonesian EFL Journal, 3*(1), 87-92.

Mark, S. O. (2014). *Tweet*. Retrieved from: thecollagist.com/thecollagist/2014/5/6/tweet.html.

Murugan, A., & Sai, G. T. B. (2017). The wonders of technology in teaching and learning English. *Indonesian EFL Journal, 3*(1), 57-68.

Petterson, P. (2014). *A man without shoes*. Retrieved from: https://apublicplace.org/magazine/details/a_man_without_shoes.

Sheal, A. (2014). *Before the storm*. Retrieved from: www.3ammagazine.com/3am/beforethestorm.

Simon, H. (2015). *Forty-four goats.* Retrieved from: https:/billchance.org/2015/06/07/.

Yomere, G. O., & Agbonifoh, B.A. (1999). *Research methodology in the social sciences and education.* Benin City: University of Benin Press.

Golf Ball

Two Golfers were approaching the first tee.

The first guy goes into his golf bag to get a ball and says to his friend - "Hey, why don't you try this ball." He draws a green golf ball out of his bag. "Use this one - You can't lose it!"

His friend replies, "What do you mean you can't lose it?!!"

The first man replies, "I'm serious, you can't lose it. If you hit it into the woods, it makes a beeping sound, if you hit it into the water it produces bubbles, and if you hit it on the fairway, smoke comes up in order for you to find it."

Obviously, his friend doesn't believe him, but he shows him all the possibilities until he is convinced. The friend says, "Wow! That's incredible! Where did you get that ball?"

The man replies, "I found it."

(Source: http://www.study-express.ru/humour/funny-stories.shtml, picture: www.google.co.id)