UNLOCKING THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GOOGLE CLASSROOM FOR ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT
Since the onset of the COVID-19 era, the educational landscape in Nigeria has witnessed a profound transformation with the emergence of several online teaching platforms as invaluable resources, especially in times of crisis, offering schools and institutions the means to adapt to the ever-evolving world of education. One platform that stands out for its versatility and user-friendly interface is Google Classroom. This paper is a comprehensive exploration of the relative potential of Google Classroom as a platform for online education. The study embarks on an exploration of its features, functionality, and practical applications while drawing comparisons with other popular platforms. This study aims to provides an insightful assessment of Google Classroom's strengths and weaknesses. It further seeks to gauge the impact of Google Classroom on teaching and learning outcomes and contemplate how it might shape the future of online education. The focus of the study is to provide pragmatic insights, highlighting best practices and emerging trends in online education, thereby empowering educators, institutions, and policymakers with the knowledge to effectively harness the transformative potential of Google Classroom in their educational pursuits.

Keywords: E-learning, Google Classroom, Hybrid Learning Mode.

1. INTRODUCTION
The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide gave rise to a situation in which teaching and learning in the traditional physical classroom environment became practically untenable. Consequently, both teachers and learners have had to embrace a hitherto untried formal educational process. Nwoke et al (2023) aver that the COVID-19 pandemic remains a clear and present indication of the crucial need to integrate technology into existing pedagogies. According to them, the negative impact of the shutdown of schools during the pandemic on educational activities especially in sub-Saharan Africa greatly underscores the need for online education as a vital part of teaching and learning, not merely as a stop-gap crisis-management intervention. Apart from the paradigm shift from the traditional modes of teaching represented by the use and utilization of the new media, it equally signals a much-needed embrace of digital technologies with the platforms, hardware and software they offer for teaching and learning. Many scholars have highlighted the relative advantages of the use of digital technologies over traditional methods for teaching and learning. Nwachukwu and Eneh (2019) stated that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionized the way we look at things, the way we act, the way we relate to people, the way we learn, relearn and unlearn. Its use has made an impactful entry into the practice of including teacher-learner interactions, lesson delivery, classroom management, as well

as methods of assessment. The global response to the need for alternative platforms for teaching has led to a proliferation of virtual platforms, many of which have primary functions unrelated to pedagogical purposes but are secondarily utilized for teaching and learning.

Old vs New Media
Traditional media is any form of teaching that doesn't use any electronic/digital device. This should not be confused with merely the traditional or modern methods of teaching but specifically refers to the utilization of materials for classroom instruction. The old media includes print (book and paper materials), films, TV, and radio, while the new media includes computer technology, smartphones and internet-based platforms. Ahuja (2015) identifies the following as some of the basic differences:

- Learner involvement: The old media made learners passive participants in the teaching-learning process in the sense that they had little contributions to make to the process, while the new media allows learners to not only consume but also to be co-producers of learning content. Ahuja (2015) referred to learners under the new media as prosumers (producers+consumers).
- Multiplicity of Delivery Platforms: Unlike old media, new media can be delivered on flexible formats – smartphones, tablets, laptops, PC etc.
- **Interactivity:** While old media offer one-way instructions, the new media allows for greater interactivity among teachers and learners, including face-to-face audio-visual facilities.
- **Scope and Reach:** While the older forms of media are limited in their scope and reach, new media, on the other hand, is far wider in its reach and scope. For example, materials on the internet are accessible for almost anyone in any part of the world with a computer, smartphone and internet connection.

New Media Platforms
This study embarks on a comparative analysis of notable online education platforms, which we believe offers vital insights into enabling educators and institutions to make informed decisions in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each platform, thus guiding choices that help in the attainment of specific educational goals and requirements. This comparative analysis serves as an invaluable compass in navigating the complex terrain of online education, empowering educational stakeholders to make the best use of available resources. The work examines popular online platforms that are adaptable for teaching and learning on the basis of adaptability, interactivity, attractiveness, functionality and operability:

- **WhatsApp:** This is a very popular and simple-to-use messaging app, and undeniably the most popular social media platform in Nigeria. Almost everyone who has a device that is internet-compliant is on the WhatsApp platform. It is important to note that even though it was not designed as a teaching/learning app,, it turned out to be the most suggested and preferred platform by students, lecturers and even some internal policy-makers in some tertiary institutions. Its popularity among students and staff and their subsequent familiarity with its operation made it the most preferable to most staff and students. It can also be deployed both synchronously and asynchronously. However, the main factor that often militates against its

use is the fact that the storage is device-based. The implication of this is that all learning materials in text and media will be stored on the device thereby constantly depleting both storage and memory spaces on the devices with the consequences of slow operations, freezing and crashing of the devices.

- **Telegram:** This is another very popular messaging app, though not as widely used as WhatsApp. Telegram shares a good number of features with WhatsApp but it also has a few good features that give it an edge over WhatsApp. The major advantage Telegram has over WhatsApp is the fact that it has unlimited cloud storage, therefore saving the user's device from the burden of teaching and learning materials on its storage. The Telegram app also can accommodate up to 200,000 users in each group, which would function as a classroom, while WhatsApp can take only 256 users in each group. However, compared with Google Classroom, one major disadvantage of Telegram is that media files create some temporary files on the device storage, which still eventually depletes space and memory on the device. Equally, both WhatsApp and Telegram are clearly configured as messaging/chat apps that can supplement classroom activities and not as substitutes for direct classroom activities.

- **Zoom:** This is a very popular application originally designed for video meetings. It has however become one of the best apps for online teaching and learning. Recent expansions on the platform are clearly configured to make it serves as a highly functional teaching and learning platform. Its seamless operations for breakout rooms and sharing digital materials make it a great resource for teaching and learning. It is however best suited for synchronous (real-time) teaching and learning. Even though it has the capacity for recording sessions for later use, that function is reserved for only users designated as hosts (teachers) and all users must sign in within class period to have access to the activities and materials. Another major challenge with the Zoom platform is that it can only accommodate 100 users for only 40 minutes per session after which all participants must sign in again. Any need for a higher number of participants for a longer period of time requires paid subscriptions. The issue of avoiding any platform that would require any payments to operate on was one of the louder terms of reference that the Committee gave itself in consideration of the grave economic situations of most of the students.

- **Edmodo**: Edmodo is designed as a social learning platform. It is therefore designed to easily facilitate discussion, collaboration, and networking among students and teachers. One of its main features is a real-time assessment feature and the integration of a gradebook feature, which allows teachers to track students' progress. The platform equally has a parental engagement facility, which promotes communication between parents and teachers regarding learners' progress. It also offers library services, which contain resources and materials that can be used in teaching.

- **Google Classroom:** Google Classroom is a learning platform developed by Google for schools. It enables considerable ease in creating teaching materials (text and media), distributing the same, and grading assignments. The platform can be used synchronously (in real-time) as well as asynchronously for teaching and learning. It is also streamlined for easy sharing of files between teachers and students. The platform is equally amenable to attaching and receiving texts and media files of various formats and displaying them on the platform for teaching and learning with a very elastic capacity for feedback in text, audio and video formats.

It also has viable mechanics for grading, synchronizing and displaying students' scores. The Google Classroom has the capacity to create and separate different classrooms for different courses with each of them displayed on the same dashboard, but with each having separate codes for joining each classroom. The platform also separates teacher functions from student functions with teachers having access to all posts by students, the power to remove a student from the classroom, grade and return each student's grade to him/her privately, facilitates team-teaching and can sync materials from other classrooms for use. Most importantly, users have unlimited cloud storage with no need to store any material on the device.

Aside from the features of a user-friendly and intuitive interface, real-time collaboration and feedback accessibility and mobile learning features, as well as high-end security and privacy features, the greatest advantage of Google Classroom is its seamless and very useful integration with Google's G-Suite. The G-Suite for Education is a suite of cloud-based productivity tools from Google, tailored for educational institutions. This ensures that Google Classroom can seamlessly leverage its applications Docs, Slides, Sheets, Gmail, Calendar, Google Forms, Hangouts, YouTube and Google Drive for content creation and collaboration. The robust security of the Google platform, which effectively covers the Google Classroom platform is a further relative advantage of the platform over its competitors.

Google Classroom's Impact on Teaching and Learning
Google Classroom as a Learning Management System (LMS) for teachers and students in online learning, provides a central site for communicating with students, sending feedback, and providing homework. It has been found to have a positive impact on student performance, student progress, and student engagement in some ways as discussed below:

Organized Teaching Environment: The teaching environment provided by Google Classroom is remarkably well-organized, serving as a central hub for educators to manage course materials, assignments, and communication efficiently. This structured approach makes the teaching process simple, and easier for teachers to handle and disseminate course content effectively.

Enhanced Communication: Google Classroom also excels in fostering seamless communication between teachers and students. The platform creates a responsive and nurturing teaching atmosphere by empowering the teacher to effortlessly disseminate announcements, offer feedback on assignments, and promptly address any questions or concerns of the learners.

Efficient Assessment and Feedback: Google Classroom streamlines the assessment and feedback process for teachers. With this platform, educators can easily create, distribute, and grade assignments. They can equally provide timely feedback and closely monitor learners' progress. This enables teachers to personalize their teaching to meet each student's unique needs.

Access to Digital Tools: Google Classroom grants access to a rich array of digital tools through its integration with G Suite for Education. This suite of productivity tools, including Google Docs, Slides, and Forms, empowers teachers to craft interactive and collaborative learning experiences.

Data Insights: Google Classroom equips educators with invaluable data and analytics, allowing them to monitor student engagement and performance. This data-driven approach empowers

teachers to pinpoint areas where students may be encountering difficulties and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly.

Implications for Online Language Teaching and Learning

The accessibility to the integrated features and applications of G-Suite in Google Classroom are greatly implicated for online language teaching and learning. This paper reviews how the embedded features of the platform can be utilized for language teaching.

a. Google Docs for Collaborative Writing

Google Docs is a word-processing application that also has the potential for document sharing by teachers and learners. This feature can be leveraged by teachers by assigning a collaborative writing task on a shared Google Doc file. Individual earners will be required to work together to add paragraph chapters in the target language. This kind of activity promotes collaborative writing, peer editing, and language proficiency development as students communicate and create content in the target language.

b. Google Forms for Language Assessment

The Google Forms application can be leveraged by teachers to create language assignments and language. Google Forms can be used to evaluate language comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. Learners will be required to provide their responses and answers to the assignments and quizzes directly into the Google Form, while the system will auto-grade the assignments while providing results and feedback instantly, which aids improvement in learning.

c. Google Hangouts for Virtual Language Practice

Google Hangouts is a communication and video conferencing platform developed by Google. It offers a range of features that facilitate various types of communication, collaboration, and meetings. Its integration with Google Meet, which is useful for larger, more structured video conferences further enhances its productivity for language learning. For example, teachers and learners can set up virtual language practice sessions using Google Hangouts. L2 and foreign languages can engage in conversation with native speakers or fellow learners through this integration. The real-time language practice and interaction thus engendered can improve speaking and listening skills as it connects learners with speakers of the target language.

d. YouTube Integration for Language Learning Skills:

This involves using YouTube, a popular video-sharing platform, as a resource for improving listening skills in a target language. The integration of YouTube is a valuable approach to enhancing language learning. The convenience of access to a real-world context, and to native speakers, which guarantees authentic cultural content and potential for vocabulary expansion, coupled with its multiplatform accessibility to diverse content, and capacity for subtitling, allows for multimodal learning, engaging multiple senses, such as visual and auditory, to enhance language learning effectiveness. For example, teachers can incorporate YouTube videos with subtitles in the target language, assign students to watch videos, listen to dialogues, and answer comprehension questions. This will help enhance listening skills and comprehension.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

In spite of the identified relative potential of Google Classroom as a veritable online teaching tool, it must be noted however that, like most other tools and platforms, it is still an evolving innovation. There are therefore several possible enhancements that could further improve the platform by making it more personalized, engaging, accessible, effective, and meeting the evolving needs of both educators and learners. These enhancements could have significant implications for the future of online teaching:

1. Integrating Google Classroom with emerging technologies like AI and machine learning tools will enhance the platform's capability to provide personalized learning experiences and create immersive educational experiences.:

2. The platform's functionality and utility as a learning platform will equally be enhanced with the integration of more sophisticated assessment tools, such as AI-driven grading analysis to provide greater insights into learners' performance.

3. Support for multiple languages and diverse learning preferences. Even though Google Classroom currently supports 54 languages, there is a need to expand the language support base to include more languages, especially African languages.

4. There is a need for improved accessibility and inclusivity features to ease operability by students with disabilities.

5. There is a need to expand the library of educational resources and materials, including open educational resources (OER), including content curation and links to additional external learning resources and platforms.

6. For improved communication regarding students' progress, there is equally a need for the development of parent-friendly dashboards for parents and guardians to track their learners' performance and engagement.

3. CONCLUSION
These recommended enhancements above, if implemented, do have significant implications for the future of online teaching as they would allow for more personalized and adaptive learning experiences, improved accessibility to a more diverse and global audience, and spark innovative approaches to teaching and learning through integration with emerging technologies.

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