Investigating a Nigerian XXL-Cohort Wiki-Learning Experience: Observation, Feedback and Reflection

Peter Aborisade
Federal University of Technology, Nigeria
baborisade2002@yahoo.com

Abstract: A regular feature of the Nigerian tertiary education context is large numbers of students crammed into small classrooms or lecture theatres. This context had long begged for the creation of innovative learning spaces and adoption of engaging pedagogies. Recourse to technology support and experimenting with the WIKI as a learning tool at the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA), Nigeria gave us an insight into the benefits and challenges of the set-up and use of new knowledge technologies in our technology-poor context. This paper reports an experiment in an extra-large (XXL) class of freshmen (2000+) on a module of second language project writing using the WIKI. The paper emphasises the unique advantages of the WIKI in a large blended learning class and the affordances for socio-cultural and collaborative learning experience. In creating new learning teams and forging collaboration among learners leveraging one another's abilities, the wiki experience extended the 'classroom' beyond the physical space, engaged students in interactional communication in the second language, encouraged negotiation of meaning, and challenged learners in finding their 'solutions' to real life problems around them, aside from acquisition of hands-on digital literacy. The paper reports on how learners experienced and participated in learning on a technology supported module. Data for the investigation and evaluation of students' learning experiences were collected using teacher observation of team formation and collaboration on activities offline and tracked students' logs, footprints and activities on group pages online; students' feedback on the end-of-course learners' evaluation forms; and their reflections as gleaned from their comments, encouraged and freely made continually by many from inception through to the end of the course, on the front page of our wiki. The report employs both qualitative and quantitative parameters. Results indicated a large number of students felt satisfied that the learning experience, though difficult, was worth their while; it opened up new vistas to the world; it got them working and learning to collaborate in groups; they developed a level of autonomy they would like to keep, and would like more of their courses supported by technology and thought the medium offered hope for the future, as it opened up new vistas in their learning.

Keywords: large classes, Wiki, e-learning, learning experience, interaction, collaboration, team work

1. Background

Class size is a crucial variable within the sociocultural setting and ethos of African educational system, especially in the Second Language (L2) classroom. A classroom as a social construct where interaction can take place is pivotal to effective language learning in an L2 situation. The Lancaster-Leeds Language Learning Research Project report (Coleman, 1989) remains the reference point in class size research. Surveying teachers from some five developing countries, including Nigeria, the report lists three categories of problems experienced by teachers to include: pedagogical (e.g. difficulties with monitoring and feedback and communicative tasks); management (e.g. discipline, correcting writing work); affective (e.g. creating rapport, learning students' moods and interests).

Previous research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has highlighted the importance of interaction in target language learning (Long, 1996). Krashen's (1982) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, both complementary, emphasise the place of learner interaction with the target language in a meaningful way to engender proficiency. More recently acknowledged are Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the place of sociocultural interaction in the development of language proficiency. Donato and McCormick (1994) and Lantolf (2000) further underline the importance of interaction, scaffolded learning and collaboration in constructing effective language classrooms.

What accentuate the large class problem in our context are the triad of escalating enrolments as a result of growing populations and increasing access to higher education, inadequate classroom spaces and facilities to meet the demands, and few numbers of teachers. Solutions to these constraints are beyond the teachers and in most cases the higher institutions. But researchers and practitioners have confirmed the many benefits of the use of learning technologies (computer and the Internet) in language education (Blake, 1987; Lee, 2000; Murray, 2000; Singhall, 1997; Shetzer, 1998). In resource- and technology-poor Nigeria, however, learning technology support for education is virtually non-existent and teachers and students are yet at the early stages of electronic literacies

(Aborisade, 2005). But Kasper (2000), among others, has emphasised the nexus between the new learning technologies and the attendant literacies.

2. The context

Till date most Nigerian classrooms follow the traditional teaching-learning methodology of rote. Large numbers of students crammed into small classrooms, teachers dictating notes or lecturing (ostensibly 'transferring knowledge') with students taking notes ('acquiring knowledge') completes the dominant ethos that results, at best, in little learning taking place. At the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA), all fresh students take 'Use of English' (EAP) courses, one in each semester of the first year; the courses are credit bearing. The second semester course is integrated Reading-Writing. Students who are mostly Nigerians usually come from a wide range of language backgrounds and they use English as second or third language; they range in competence from upper intermediate to advanced levels. Students come to the course from various disciplines - biological and physical sciences, and engineering; students are grouped along disciplinary streams. Class size ranges from 100 or 150 (where this can be arranged) and 700 in many cases, each stream taught by one of four regular teachers; some 2000+ students complete the course each year. Students demonstrate a palpable lack of motivation and interest in the courses.

3. The challenge

In our context, the driver of change was the large class situation and our inability to interact with the students on a one-on-one basis and get students to use the target language in their interaction. The physical classroom had become an albatross, at all times in short supply and attempts to vary its design are resisted by authority. We experimented with getting students to do some project work outside classroom walls in groups, including gathering information from online sources. This was found to be useful but insufficient. However, the lesson from group work collaboration on the writing project pointed the direction for change: the need to offer further technology support in a way that shifts emphasis away from the well-known physical classroom yet extends the work of the classroom, promoting interaction and the use of the target language.

The stimulus for the change came through the e-learning symposium organized by the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, University of Southampton in January 2008, where Steve Wheeler's (2008) presentation on using the Wiki showed one way to create new learning environments.

4. The project

The project reported here is the transformation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing course, from an essentially face-to-face offering into one supported by a Web 2.0 tool in a blended learning environment. The purpose of the project was to solve a nagging practical problem of teachers' helplessness in motivating and engaging the large numbers of students in real learning; the experimentation with technology was not intended as a research project, though we attempted, right from the beginning, to monitor the processes with the aim of informing practice. It is within this context that our conception of integrating the e-learning technology is framed and our perception of its effect measured and situated. This paper reports the experiment in an extra-large (XXL) class of freshmen (2000+) on a module of second language project writing using the WIKI. The paper emphasises the unique advantages of the WIKI in a large blended learning class and the affordances for socio-cultural and collaborative learning experience. What follows are the four stages of implementing the project.

4.1 Planning and teacher orientation

Following the teaching team's agreement to explore the possibilities offered by the Wiki, we sought to find out how the integration could be done. It was soon agreed that a blended learning approach offered the best option. Much of the work would have to be carried on off-line, in and out of class, since both teachers and students needed to come to grips with e-skills and e-pedagogy. The steps are sketched out below:

- Several teacher-orientation meetings were held to re-orientate the course design and agree methods;
- Students' teams/groups were agreed on departmental basis in class; students elect team leaders and assigned a role for each member;

- The new course content, components and group lists were uploaded to the Wiki site by teachers.

4.2 Learner, environment and activity

Once the Wiki was set up (http://futagns.pbwiki.com), students were taken through it in an orientation class. Explanations were provided on how to log in, edit their profiles and collaborate on group pages. What takes place in the three learning environments: teacher-fronted classroom, out of class group meetings and wiki site, are explained. Components of this process are as follows:

- Learning activity is central to the exploitation of learner characteristics (preferences, needs, abilities, approaches etc) and learning environments (tools, resources and affordances of the physical and virtual environments, etc);

- Learning activities with some clear outcomes are set; activities are aimed to get students to appreciate and understand their own processes of composing, and to build their strategies for the writing project;

- Rules of engagement are agreed for teacher-student, student-site (netiquette) and student-student interactions.

4.3 Monitoring, facilitation and evaluation

The main product outcome for the course is a term paper (academic writing) that begins the induction of freshmen apprentices into the academic culture. Along the route to this final product are a few milestones for the learners to cover. En route, however, teachers, experts, resources and learner interactions and collaborations assist in the development of proficiency. Feedback is provided at various levels and on various activities, in class and on the group pages, both by teachers and peers. Teachers are learning to step back, cede some control to students who gradually begin to assume some level of autonomy in the learning process and learn to take control of their learning. Built into the wiki are facilities for some level of qualitative evaluation which can be taken advantage of in addition to traditional formative and progressive evaluation methods.

5. The study

A Wiki is a collaborative authoring tool providing learners with an opportunity to create their own learning environment, interacting with one another outside the classroom offline as well as online. The main learning activity was an enquiry of the impact of waste management on the Nigerian environment. This paper reports an investigation of these students' experiences from their perspectives and also teacher observations.

Research questions

The study sought to find information on students' experience of working on a module supported by technology in three areas: Learning processes, working in teams and taking leadership roles. The main questions in this regard were on:

- Perception of the manner of, knowledge and confidence in carrying out a number of activities and processes relating to their learning;

- Whether there was any difference between their learning experience before the technology supported course or not; and

- If there was a difference, how significant this might be.

Participants

The participants are full time registered fresh students of the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA). Altogether, a total of about 2200 students across five faculties took the course facilitated by one contract and four full-time teachers along faculty groupings/lines. For the purpose of this report however focus would be for the most part on students of the Faculty (School) of Agriculture who were the only group surveyed using the quantitative instrument for this study. This comprises seven departments made up of five hundred and ten (510) students in the second semester of 2007-2008 academic session. It was felt that this would be a manageable unit to consider as a starting point for the online survey in our experience of a paradigm shift.

Methods

The methods employed for this investigation included both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative is used to analyse the relationships between variables while the qualitative is used for processes that were not set up to be measured in terms of amount and frequency.

The questionnaire

The instrument for the quantitative measurement is the questionnaire, adapted from University of Manchester's CEEBL website. Sections 1 and 3 pose closed-ended questions. Section 1 contains thirty two questions about goals, knowledge, skills and abilities (competencies) and confidence on the course and its processes. In section 3, questions seek to confirm in a more definitive way students' confidence in the use of computer and internet in learning, and taking leadership roles, issues also earlier enquired about in Section 1.

Questions in Section 2 aim to get the students to reflect on their learning processes, outcomes and difficulties encountered during the course. These combine with comments offered on the Wiki front page: http://futagns.pbwiki.com by students over the duration of the course about their impressions, experiences, difficulties and expectations.

The Observation

This consisted of observing the processes of team formation, functioning and collaboration on activities and tasks. The teacher initiated and facilitated group formation in class, class members elected/appointed group leaders after a few confident ones had volunteered to be leaders, and members signed up for whichever group they wanted to be in out of class; thereafter they assign roles to each group member, that is, every member has a leadership role to play. The group list was submitted to the teacher who ascertained that no member was signed up or appointed to roles without their knowledge and consent. Agreed group meeting schedules are submitted to the teacher and also logged on wiki group pages by students; the teacher monitors some of the meetings. An "impressionistic approach" (Wallace, 2003:9) is taken with group meeting/work observation. This provided the researcher with opportunities to have a glimpse of how meetings went, how many members usually attended, what participation levels were and what activities members engaged in and importantly, in what language they interacted. During such observations notes were taken. Of a total of 52 teams, only a few (10) were observed for all these purposes, however. But no group knew which ones were going to be visited and which were not, all 52 expected to be observed.

Wiki pages

The wiki pages offer opportunities for monitoring and gathering data. Front page comments are encouraged and this keeps a log of all users' comments. The comments give an insight into how students feel; what problems they are having every step en route to the end of the course and what they would like introduced or changed. This could be used as a reflective tool in their learning curves. The 'Allpages' logs offer the teacher-researcher data on 'hits' on user visits to the wiki. Tracked students' logs, footprints and activities on group pages online offer the final source of information.

6. Results and discussion

As stated earlier the Wiki was not set up for experimental purposes, but rather as practitioners' response to the challenges in our teaching and learning situation. The project was therefore not set up as an ideal research project whose results could be applied wholesale across the teaching-learning spectrum and in all contexts. The teaching team knew the advantages of the change initiative and kept some records of the processes for a research report of practice that informs action.

The purpose of the end-of-course evaluation was to find information on students' experience of working on a course supported by technology. The questions in section 1 sought information on students' experiences on the course in relation to their: understanding, difficulties, team work, leadership role, research, lecturer support, course methods and more, and their knowledge and confidence in carrying out a number of activities relating to their learning; and these served to indicate improvement levels at the end of the course.

It was a pre-requisite that before the end of the course all students should have functioning e-mail accounts. At commencement of the course, investigations revealed that less than two thirds had functional e-mail addresses and use the internet frequently and unaided; this pattern is in consonance with freshmen investigations in previous two sessions (Aborisade, 2007). The evaluation questionnaire was sent to all of the five hundred and ten (510) students of the School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (SAAT). Two hundred and thirty-five (235) of responses received by the deadline were considered, giving a response rate of 46.07%; those that came after the deadline were rejected. Given the students' enthusiasm, two factors were known to be responsible for the response rate. First, some students' email addresses were apparently not written correctly in the process of typing a hand-written list submitted and when the evaluation was sent the message bounced back for a good number of them. Secondly, some other students who had correctly written e-mail addresses could not get the mails because they had moved to villages and small towns after the semester where there was no internet access. Not all the 235 responses completed the questionnaire in full; a total of 160 which answered all the questions were used for analysis.

The 32 questions that make up section 1 were grouped into three main areas for purposes of analysis: Learning processes, Team work and Leadership role. Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 came under the category 'Learning processes'. Likewise, questions 4, 14, 15, 17, 22, 23, 24 and 26 came in the category 'Team work', while numbers 19 and 28 went for 'Leadership role'. Questions 3, 12, 16 and 18 were reversed in meaning for the analysis because they were framed in the negative. Respondents were asked to mark an 'x' to indicate a choice, on a scale of 1 - 5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree, statements of what they felt, did, learnt etc on the course. Scales 1 - 3 were classified as low improvement while 4 and 5 were classified as high improvement. Tables 1a, 1b, 1c present the data for the three areas.

Table 1a: Learning processes – improvement rates

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low improvement	0	0%
High improvement	160	100.0%
Total	160	100.0%

The findings from this table indicate that all respondents reported considerable improvements in their learning processes and have had rewarding learning experiences. This relates directly to the first research question, that is, students' perceptions of the manner of, knowledge and confidence in carrying out a number of activities and processes relating to their learning. From this, students are quite positive in their perception of the value of a technology supported course.

Table 1b: Team work – improvement rates

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low improvement	3	1.9%
High improvement	157	98.1%
Total	160	100.0%

Like in the first category, improvement in team work received very positive ratings from the respondents, albeit a little lower than for the learning processes. 98% of respondents have reported high improvement rates. Table 1c below shows fewer numbers of students are ever ready to take on leadership positions, however by a value of 78.8% the outlook is equally bright. In comparison to the two earlier categories it tells the story of how difficult it was getting students to take up leadership positions.

Table 1c: Leadership role – improvement rates

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low improvement	34	21.3%
High improvement	126	78.8%
Total	160	100.0%

Going by the figures and values in the three tables above, respondents' views of their learning processes indicate very positive gains from the course in all respects. The same is true of their attitude to and participation in team work and taking/playing leadership roles. How much of these claims are corroborated by some of the other data in this evaluation would determine how correct respondents might be in their views. Questions can be raised on the extent to which every respondent felt this course has been useful to them; we may not rule out the influence of the 'Wao!' effect of the initial stages of technology introduction – a development that excites the youth.

Section 3 of the evaluation questionnaire completes the quantitative data of this investigation. Six questions are posed here, a pair for each of the following three issues, before and after GNS 102:

- confidence level on taking a course supported specifically by a Wiki
- confidence level in taking on a leadership role in a team
- knowledge of using the Internet to run a course

The first pair of questions asked about the level of confidence before and after. For instance, question 1a asked, *"At the beginning of GNS 102 my confidence level in taking a course supported by Internet (using a Wiki) was _____ out of 10"*. Respondents chose a number between 1 and 10 to indicate their level. In posing these questions we wanted to find out specifically how much confidence and knowledge of e-learning students had before this course; and how much they had learnt (and how much their confidence level had grown) about taking leadership roles in collaborative learning. Opinions offered in this section would go to dispel or corroborate claims made earlier in section 1.The responses are analysed using Paired Sample Statistics for dependent sample t-test, Paired Sample Correlations for relationship test and Paired Samples Test for significance. A null hypothesis was formulated for each question.

Ho_1: There is no significant difference, before and after the course, in students' confidence level on taking a course supported by a Wiki.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference, before and after the course, in students' confidence level in taking on leadership role in a team.

Ho_3: There is no significant difference, before and after the course, in students' knowledge about using the internet to run a course.

Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c show the results of the first hypothesis about the difference in confidence level of students on a course supported by Wiki.

Table 2a: Paired samples statistics- internet supported course

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair1: Taking a course supported by Internet -after the course	7.84	160	1.983	.157
Taking a course supported by Internet- before the course	5.08	160	2.579	.204

Table 2b: Paired samples correlations- internet supported course

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair1: Taking a course supported by Internet- after the course Taking a course supported by Internet- before the course	160	.483	.000

Table 2c: Paired sample test- internet supported course

	Paired Difference					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair1: Taking a course supported by Internet-after the course Taking a course supported by Internet- before the course	2.763	2.375	.188	2.392	3.133	14.712	159	.000

Results for Section 1 of the evaluation indicate high improvement in the three areas of learning processes, team work and taking leadership roles. Tables 2a, 2b and 2c combine to show the significance value for the difference between before and after, in taking a course supported by the Internet (Wiki). By the difference of the Mean of 5.08 (Before) and 7.84 (After) the Paired Samples Statistics indicate a positive improvement. Table 2b (Paired Samples Correlations) indicates a positive value and positive relationship of improvement being linked to technology support. Table 2c is the main test for the hypothesis. By the Mean of all values (2.763) and the test statistic value of 14.712 the hypothesis that 'There is no significant difference, before and after the course, in students' confidence level on taking a course supported by a Wiki' is rejected; there is improvement and this is indeed significant. This same pattern is indicated for the two other hypotheses, on leadership role and knowledge about using the internet. Students indicated that before the course they had no knowledge of technology-supported courses. The three tables of paired samples show that for each of these three hypotheses, there have been differences and these are significant; positive values and relationships are established, and these are significant. The null hypotheses are therefore rejected.

Table 3a: Paired sample statistics- leadership role

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Taking a leadership role- After	7.61	160	2.291	.181
Taking a leadership role – Before	4.71	160	1.998	.158

Table 3b: Paired samples correlations – leadership role

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Taking a leadership role- After Taking a leadership role – Before	160	.438	.000

Table 3c: Paired sample test – leadership role

	Paired Difference							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Taking a leadership role- After Taking a leadership role – Before	2.894	2.286	.181	2.537	3.251	16.009	159	.000

Table 4a: Paired samples statistics – knowledge of using internet for courses

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Knowledge of using internet- After	8.13	160	1.826	.144
Knowledge of using internet- Before	5.12	160	2.669	.211

Table 4b: Paired samples correlations - knowledge of using internet for courses

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Knowledge of using internet- After Knowledge of using internet- Before	160	.432	.000

Table 4c: Paired samples test – knowledge of using the internet for courses

	Paired Difference					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Knowledge of using internet-After Knowledge of using internet-Before	3.012	2.500	.198	2.622	3.403	15.240	159	.000

From the findings of the two sections of the post-course evaluation, students have positive perceptions of the course supported by technology; as to whether there was any differences between their learning experience before and after, evidence in Section 3 corroborate students' perceptions expressed in Section 1. Further, it is shown that the difference in experience is indeed significant.

Section 2 of the evaluation is qualitative, asking students to reflect on their learning processes and identify some of the things they thought they found positive or negative (e.g. useful, helpful, difficult and so on). We have selected the two most mentioned items for each question as listed in Table 5. The following topped their lists:

Table 5: What students liked/did not like

Helpful	Use internet more; use library
Useful	Group work; internet
Changed way of learning	Team work; autonomy
Made learning effective	Internet; challenging tasks
Found most difficult	Searching for materials
Need to do to improve	Do more research; work harder
Need to stop doing	Playing too much
What teacher needs to stop, do, continue	More autonomy; continue in new way

Taken together with the other sections of the evaluation it is clear that students on the Wiki course are excited about innovations to a course that had always been a bore. In response to what they found most difficult, however, they failed to mention the initial difficulties they had adapting to the new technologies, perhaps in their excitement with technology having overcome initial challenges. It must be noted nevertheless that team work and autonomy were identified as having changed their way of learning and the Internet made learning effective; these two categories combine in what they found to be most useful. These are without doubt the affordances of a technology supported module within the blended learning approach to e-learning. We note also that our students found searching for materials a difficult activity; this is not unconnected with the problems associated with the amount of information and sources that turn up when they search without adequate refinement of their search terms. Using appropriate search engines and refinement of terms is an area that has to be attended to subsequently. It is a short in the arm for change drivers to indicate their support for technology supported modules and a request for more autonomy in view of faculty reticence to take up the media, although these have to be handled with care.

Teacher observation of the processes indicated that setting up groups and getting them to bond was a particularly difficult part; most hesitated in taking up leadership positions but once in were usually ready to accept responsibilities. After explaining how the group would work and its importance to the process, we called for individuals who had played and who would like to lead the groups to volunteer on departmental basis. But only about 50% of the required number had the confidence to do so. The others had to be prompted, cajoaled and egged on by their colleagues. Getting the groups to function was considerably more difficult in the two to three weeks scheduled for settling in and bonding; but once they got under way, our notes indicated that fewer than 10 groups (≤19%) had problems of bonding. The teacher was not able to critically observe all 52 groups and had to randomly select 10 for this purpose, although all groups received at least a visit. Students had no idea what groups were

being observed as all expected more visits. Note was taken on attendance, contribution to discussions, language of interaction, and readiness to take on tasks. Several group leaders came up to the teacher to report uncooperating colleagues but it is noteworthy also that groups were usually reluctant to openly report recalcitrant members of the group in class; surprise visits to some groups gave away these members. Usually also these individuals were called upon by the teacher to present/defend group positions on given activities in class, this gets members to take things more seriously. Measures taken and known to students on individual assessments reduced the number of truant students to less than 5% by mid semester. Initially it was difficult for members to keep to meeting schedules, but knowing that teachers checked on them unannounced helped to keep most on track, and for them to participate in the group work and carry out assignments. Although most students shared the same L1, interaction in groups was mostly in L2. Asked why there was such a high degree of L2 interaction during group work while most students' interaction out of class was either in pidgin or mixed codes, many students during observation visits agreed it was because assignments/activities had to be written or defended in the English L2. Virtually all groups visited experts for consultations on their chosen topics, and this reflected in the write ups. Everything considered most students benefited from group work and were willing to say so even to students at other levels and courses.

The Wiki logs, footprints and front page comments offer, if not a most accurate quantitative evidence, very useful insight into students' online activities and reflections of their learning experience, and their expectations of the environments and pedagogy that could meaningfully engage them in knowledge construction. After set up by the four teachers, the Wiki (http://futagns.pbwiki.com) comprised a total of 671 pages: about 657 set up by teachers and 14 set up by students on their own (trying to learn to set up). Group pages yielded about 1287 visits, mostly for edits, and this is apart from visits to the front page to post comments. Initially, many students had difficulty logging in to do any work at all. For a while, many messed up the front page not knowing how to proceed to group pages. Often teachers explained over and over again that the front page was not a work station for students. Finally we had to post a warning on the front page, asking visitors not to edit, cancel or delete the page.

By mid-semester everyone had mastered the navigation systems. The Wiki had the advantage of restoring every page to the default or an earlier date/point and we could monitor visitors' footprints, especially because every student had registered and had an identity on the site. Given the number of hits on the group pages, considering that the site was on for only about seven weeks of the semester and that many could neither log in immediately nor edit the pages themselves, interest in the wiki is apparent and high. A particular group page recorded 96 visits (not all of these indicated meaningful edits, however).

Assessment on the course took account of the number of visits to group pages and the amount of work done on the page. A definite number of tasks had to be completed on the site and submission of certain assignments was on definite pages set up for the purpose. All these were monitored and accounted for a portfolio for each group.

As stated above, comments on the front page were encouraged and these covered every aspect of the course as students might wish to make their voices heard, but were warned not to turn the page into a social networking one. In spite of this many posts featured social issues and many of these were written in Nigerian pidgin. Nevertheless, the front page comments offered some of the most insightful statements, reflecting the students' learning curves. A few of these are brought out to show the trajectory of students' learning experience. They are reproduced unedited, spelling, grammar errors and all:

> *This site is not well programmed.It is rejecting my valid email address.pls help me* out *.israelmarc@ymail.com*

> *sir,we are having a problem with our page,we do not know how to correct it.HELPPPPPP!!!!!!!.SAAT FWL GROUP 4*

> *THE WIKI IDEA IS GREAT ONE.AT LEAST NOW, OTHER UNIVERSITIES AROUND THE GLOBE CAN SEE FROM OUR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND LEARN FROM OUR OWN IDEAS TOO.IT'S REALLY A GREAT ONE,I MUST CONFESS.KUDOS TO THE INITIATORS*

your efforts are really appreciated towards making this course an interesting one.It has helped in diverse ways;sourcing for information, exchanging ideas, surfing the internet for vital information and working on time

This course affords students the rare opportunity of team work experience on the world wide web. I think its the beginning of better days ahead for Nigerian student if innovations as these are imbibed in our academic culture. Its simply wonderful!

hi,fellow members pf my grp,dayo.mistura,tunde and tosin.Thanks 4 ur cooperation,i hope we have good grades.i cant wait to start writing my Project.

7. Outcomes and challenges

The great advantages of the technology supported module for large classes using blended learning reside more in the possibilities of extending the classroom beyond the walls, on- and off-line; providing for collaboration and interaction while engaging with materials in the process of carrying out an enquiry. Following the process-product approach, students' ICT and Internet skills improved from most not being able to do more than check and send e-mails to sourcing for information online and editing materials. Moreover they are able to use the computer and Internet for academic purposes towards writing a term paper which is a major outcome and product of the course. En route to this major goal the course ensured interaction between students in the process of group work and in class.

Reflecting on the processes and achievements on this module, a number of challenges have come up which were neither expected nor necessarily thought of at inception, but would continue to determine progress in our efforts at enhancing learning through technologies. First, the great level of enthusiasm shown by our students after initial doubts has brought about great expectations that we cannot afford to fail to deliver on. The expectations must be matched by appropriate speed and caution. This requires provisioning by administration in the areas of ICT infrastructure and training (since no ready pool exits in Nigeria) of learning technologists. Secondly, in order to match the enthusiasm and expectations of students, strategies have to be devised for gradual but steady learning technologies uptake by faculty in students' core disciplinary areas. Thirdly, as is well accepted now that supporting learning with technology requires knowledge of its pedagogy, our institution requires a planned course of action to get faculty trained on an on-going basis on pedagogy. Associated to this is the all important matter of assessment methods. If learning processes are changing so must the assessment methods and processes as well as dictated by the pedagogy. Knowledge of new pedagogies would necessitate and dictate the way to go, but the critical issue is reluctance to change by faculty and staff already grounded in their own ways and methods.

8. Conclusion

In technology poor environments of third world countries a whole lot can be done to enhance the learning experiences of our young learners who are more at home with new technologies. The attempt reported here using the Wiki is the first that we are aware of in Nigeria. For us, creating learning teams and forging collaboration among learners leveraging one another's abilities, the wiki experience extended the 'classroom' beyond the physical space and engaged students in interactional communication in the second language. The experience of our students is an impetus to go on and extend the possibilities. But there are challenges, for our institutions, teachers, governments and students themselves. If we are ever going to tackle the problem of large class numbers in Africa and the rest of the developing world teachers would have to look towards technology and appropriate technologies for their situations. The current evaluation is far from being quantitatively exact in technical terms, but it does give an idea of how we have been able to integrate technology and the effect this is having in our educational context.

References

Aborisade, P.A. (2005) Language Learning and Knowledge Technologies: How Literate are Language Teachers? *English Language Teaching Today* (ELTT).Vol. 4 No1, pp 29 – 34

Aborisade, P. (2007) Nigerian EAP teachers and knowledge technologies: What competences do we have? *Proceedings of BALEAP Conference*, Durham (in press).

Blake, R. (1987) CALL and the Language Lab of the Future. *ADFL Bulletin*, 18 (2), pp 25 –29. (Cited in Singhall, 1997).

Coleman, H. (1989) *Large Classes in Nigeria.* ISBN 1 872351 05 0. Report No. 6.

Donato, R. & McCormick, D. (1994) A sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies: the role of mediation, *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 78 No.4, pp 453–464.

Kasper, L.F. (2000) New Technologies, New Literacies: Focus Discipline Research and ESL Learning Communities. *Language Learning and Technology* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp 105-128. (Retrieved on July 20, 2006).

Krashen, S. (1982) *Principles and practice in second language acquisition,* Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Lantolf, J. (2000) *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Lee, K. (2000) English Teachers' Barriers to the Use of Computer-assisted Language Learning. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VI, No.12, December (Retrieved June 26, 2005) http://iteslj.org/

Long, M. (1996) "The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition", In M.T. Ritchie & K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* pp 413-468, Academic Press, San Diego, CA.

Murray, D.E. (2000) "Changing Technologies, Changing Literacy Communities?" *Language Learning and Technology*. Vol. 4, No.2, September, pp 43 – 58.

Shetzer, H. (1998) "Electronic literacies: Bridging the gap", Paper presented at the 1998 conference of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages, Seattle, WA. (Cited in Kasper, L. 2000).

Singhall, M. (1997) "The Internet and Foreign Language Education: Benefits and Challenges", *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. III, No.6, June (Retrieved June 26, 2005) http://iteslj.org/

Swain, M. (1985) "Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development", In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* pp 236-244, Newbury House, Rowley, MA.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, *MA.*