

INTEGRATING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

An average Indian, however educated is often influenced by his Mother – tongue while speaking in English. They have only a rough idea about the basic principles of grammar. A large-scale failure of students in examination and interviews are due to poor communication skills. An average language learner is satisfied with the training programmes available in capsule form. By integrating technology into classroom, learning could be made better, provided it is applied appropriately. The classroom should explore specific instructional techniques or strategies in order to promote meaningful learning in English language. The approach is to prepare students for entering into job market. Hence, technology should be used to facilitate both teaching and learning. Traditional method of language teaching will not have the desired impact, as the present generation has undergone a tumultuous shift and it is imperative that the dynamics of language learning should be altered. Learning should be both auditory and visual to capture the attention of the learner. Through technology, emphasis can be laid on nuances of pronunciation, stress and intonation which are the most important characteristic in language learning. The language labs will facilitate learning English as second language and hone the fundamental skills required i.e. listening and speaking effectively. Information Technology creates lifelong authentic learning methodology where the learner is responsible for his own learning and facilitates the participant in their learning journey with much involvement. The equipments thus updated with multimedia facilities like online network of workstations make learning fast and convenient for the learner. This can provide a solution to combat the intricacies of this dynamic world successfully.

Introduction:

In India, though English is considered as the Official Language, a person with sound knowledge about the language is scant. An average Indian, however educated, is influenced by his First Language (Mother-tongue), the environment in which he grew up, the dialect he is exposed to: a confluence of such factors. We cannot overrule the fact that English is spoken with ‘carelessness’; though not deliberately. The ‘educated’ Indians, who have their primary education in English Medium has only a rough idea about the basic principles of grammar. A cursory look at the results of examination and interviews conducted across the country may make us shockingly realize that a large-scale failure of students is in the subject of English. The language learners expect to acquire fluency in English by adopting simple and easy methodology. The intricacies and complexities in English are often ignored by the learners who are satisfied with training programmes available in capsule form.

The type of training and exposure a student gets during his school days is not sufficient enough to make him speak Good English i.e. English which is grammatical. It is very evident that the school-teachers are not giving due importance to the teaching of the language: it is just another subject, ignoring the fact that it is an integral part of our life. The common mistake made by an average Indian is his inability to express his thoughts and ideas effectively in English Language. There is an unconscious conflict of thought process from mother-tongue to this foreign language, resulting in poor communication. Indian English is a distinct variety of the English language. Though we claim that it is very similar to British English, it is based only on a surface level of lexical similarities. A great deal of regional and educational differentiations exists and not every linguistic item is used by Indian English speaker.

Now the question is how does one develop good communication skills?

The modern world of Corporate, technology and learning has laid a strong emphasis on high-scale effective communication skills, in order to win heavy competition in all spheres of life. Eighty percent of the qualified job-seekers fail in interviews due to lack of proper communication skills.

In the changing scenario of this dynamic world, it has become imperative that the educational institutions should adopt strategies catering to the need of the students in particular and society in general. Learning English language that has achieved the status of International Language only can provide a solution to combat the intricacies of this corporate world successfully.

Technology as a tool:

Integrating technology as a tool into the classroom should be to develop better understanding of basic concepts and apply it appropriately. The language learning classroom should explore some specific instructional techniques that can be used to promote meaningful learning in English language. The method should be to apply apposite technology through analytical, graphical and visual approaches.

We should emphasize on preparing the students for entering into the job market. Language learning through Information Technology can create a lifelong authentic learning where participants are responsible for their own learning. The learners will have a rendezvous with the latest technology and be exposed to the fascinating world of Language learning. The facilitator’s role is to guide them through the learning journey. They should actively participate and do their tasks with much involvement. In order to master the tricky terrain of the English language one needs to understand the language in all its complexities. It needs patience and

perseverance on the part of the learner and openness to the constant evolution that takes place in the language.

Earlier it was just auditory method of language learning. The teacher who has “mastered” the language exposes the learner to a methodology as comprehended by him. Thus, we could find strong influence of Mother Tongue while speaking often leading us to embarrassing situations. A foreigner to English language will have **difficulty in placing the Prepositions and proper pronunciation. Their ideas will not be precise and circumlocution due to poor diction.** The conflict occurs when the speaker think in their respective mother-tongue and mentally translate that into English before speaking. This has brought in a necessity to depend on technology as our main tool to language learning. The equipments used should be updated with multimedia facilities and an online network stations will improve their knowledge, which in turn will make learning fast and convenient.

We are under the duress to achieve stellar results in a short span of time. The axiom is “short term, immediate gains”, with the Technology making its inroad into classroom with smart boards, PowerPoint presentations etc. The present generation has undergone a tumultuous shift and so, our dynamics of language learning should be altered. We have to keep in pace with a generation raised on a multimedia diet. Technology has fast-forwarded the lives of them that traditional method of teaching is not accepted anymore. The use of technology should facilitate both teaching and learning. The learning should be both auditory and visual to capture the interested of the learner, who otherwise could get bored with intense grammar and accent training. Too often we fail in the right blend of technologies, forgetting the benefit of technology to replicate the existing practice and its ability to combine idea and product to encourage learners to engage in deeper cognitive activity based learning. A number of studies have been conducted which show using technology in classroom to be beneficial to academic achievement. We need to expose learners to various uses of technology as opposed to using the computers and such equipments merely as a device. These tools should allow the learner to speculate and explore interconnectedness of ideas and help them to develop flexible networks [2]. The tools thus used can link higher-order concepts and simulations to real-world applications. “Teachers are more likely to embrace technologies if they can see the connection between their work and tools”. [3] One of the most powerful uses of technology is that we can tailor instructions to individual learning needs and accommodate various learning styles. It begins with the facilitator preparing lessons in meaningful and relevant ways not allowing the technology to dominate the curriculum but only as a support.

The English language lab and other such tools used in language learning should aim at facilitating it as a second language to hone the basic skills of any language i.e. listening and speaking. The modern gazettes like Teacher and Student Consoles, Headphones, Audio- visual Aids exposes them to language in its entirety. This will provide them various opportunities to speak, comprehend and internalize English language like a native speaker. Importance should be given to learning the subtle nuances of pronunciations; intonation and accent, stress to endow the learner with such accomplishment as would augment their oratorical skills and thereby boost up their confidence to crack job interviews. This would consequently improve their prospects in opening up new vistas in the country and around the world.

Implementing it as a supporting tool:

The teachers or facilitators should undergo training in order to enable them to assess the development of their own skills, experience and understanding. They must be familiar with the

latest jargons and terminologies used in the world of technology and have knowledge about basic computing. Technology can be used constructively in language learning, by choosing a computer function that may catch the attention of the learner. The topics should be appropriate to their level, needs and interests. The teacher can use the Internet, digital media tools and common software applications to enhance language learning. The benefits of using computers are:

1. Multimodal practice with feedback.
2. Individualization in large class.
3. Pair & small group work on projects
4. Fun factor
5. Variety in resources available & learning styles used
6. Real-life skill-building in computer use. [5]

Collaborative projects, games and simulations, blogging and podcasts, web Quets are some of the authentic language learning opportunities a learner can explore. Skill areas like Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing could be developed through explicit practice and inductive online learning. The facilitator can select materials that teach appropriate vocabulary and provide learners with access to online dictionaries and concordances. [5]

The use of written electronic communication will provide more opportunities for participation and oral interaction among learners. The task should challenge the students to learn more English. The activities could be used with technology and the learner should be provided with information for further references and connecting websites.

Though, on the flip side, technology has reduced the ability of children to think and be creative, in a language learning scenario, it opens new vistas in learning techniques. The learner should however, be made to understand that the course thus taken is not a computer course, but an English course with computer content integrated into it.

Thus Technology can help you:

1. Create visual aids for teaching.
2. Improve access to resources, such as online literature libraries
3. Review and comment on student work more efficiently
4. Integrate video clips into presentations
5. Broaden choices for students to demonstrate learning. [4]

Needless to say that, no technology or innovation can replace the presence of a tutor who tirelessly imparts knowledge to the learner with apt dexterity.

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