



The Emergence of ICT Revolution and the Need of Integrating ICT to Improve Academic Standards in Higher Education and ELT in India

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Abstract

In a global village, we need a 'global language' for communication and in the present scenario, English fulfils that role. The emergence of English as a global language in the ICT age gives impetus to the application of ICT in English language teaching and the present paper focuses on the ways and means of finding out how ICT can be effectively used to improve the communicative skills of Higher Education students in India especially in the state of Kerala. ICT is a synonym for Information Technology (IT) but unlike IT focuses primarily on communication technologies. The recent revolutionary developments in ICT have changed our world into what is called a 'knowledge society', where information is more globally shared and freely accessed than ever before and its advances affect all aspects of our life, especially our approach to Education and ELT. This paper further discusses how far ICT can be used to improve the quality of education, especially that of ELT, in the state of Kerala. Nowadays most of the Higher Education students in Kerala can read and write well in English, but they have less communicative competence. It is assumed that technology enhanced teaching will provide ample opportunities for our learners to listen to good English and eventually help for better communication skills.

Key Words: ICT , ELT, CLL, CALL and ET:

ICT: Information and Communication Technology, **ELT:** English Language Teaching,
CLL: Communicative Language Learning, **CALL:** Computer Assisted Language Learning
and **ET:** Educational Technology

1.0 Introduction

Information, Knowledge, and Communication Technology plays vital role in imparting education in modern scenario. We live in an age of computers and there are growing demands on almost everyone, including teachers, students and business men, to become technologically literate today. ICT stands for 'Information and Communication Technology' and it refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. The ICT changed the way of imparting education in modern



era. The higher education in India has seen the massive growth in post- independence era. ICT plays a great role in strengthening the three traditional branches that make up the mission of Higher Education in India, i.e teaching, research and service to the society.

Until the 1980s, media relied primarily upon print and analogue broadcast models, such as those of television and radio. The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation into media which are predicated upon the use of digital technologies, such as the internet and video games. The revolutions happening in new media together refer to ICT revolution. At the height of the Internet boom of the 1990's, a fashionable saying was "the Internet changes everything". Use of ICTs can process information, create knowledge base and make them available wherever and whenever necessary.

1.1 Definition of Key Term ICT

According to Blurton, ICT is defined as "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information". Information and communication technologies have provided society with a vast array of new communication capabilities. For example, people can communicate in real-time with others in different countries using technologies such as instant messaging, voice over IP (VoIP), and video-conferencing. Social networking websites like 'Facebook' allow users from all over the world to remain in contact and communicate on a regular basis. ("definition of ict"/ www.techterms.com).

Paužaitė and Kešutis state (50-51) in "The Concepts of Information and Knowledge Societies: Affinities and Distinctions" that the human society experiences continual and never-ending processes of development in social, cultural, economical, and technological realms. Recently, the society appears in a very dynamic and constantly changing stage in which technologies, information and knowledge play a very important and significant role. The diffusion of information and communication technologies appears as new opportunities for development. Under the influence of these changes, the creation of information society started and the formation of other phenomena, including knowledge society, happened.

As the acronym ICT stands for Information, Communication, and Technology, all these three catch words are highly important as far as the modern world is concerned. We live in a world where revolution takes place in all these three fields such as explosion of knowledge/information, media revolution and the development of science and technology. The convergence and conglomeration of computing, tele-communications and entertainment technologies together are designated as ICT.

ICT is a more specific term that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications, computers as well as necessary enterprises of



software and middleware. The term 'info-communications' is sometimes used interchangeably with ICT ("Info-communications"/Wiki). The Internet - alias the Net - is also known as cyberspace/the information super-highway/the on-line community/the electronic library or as digital revolution. It has been hyped as the most significant development in communication tools through various application programmes such as e-mail and World Wide Web (WWW).

1.2 Apprehensions on Future of English in ICT Age

As the world is in transition, so is English language itself taking new forms. English has changed substantially in the 1500 years of its use, reflecting patterns of contact with other languages and the changing communication needs of its people. Today, English is considered a global language since it is mainly used for communication in the cyber world. With computers playing a major role in ELT today, the future of English in ICT age is a matter of debate.

Graddol in his book *The Future of English* identifies significant global trends in Economics, Technology and Culture which may affect the learning and use of English internationally in the 21st century (2). It also explores the impact on English of developments in 'Communications Technology' with English widely regarded as having assumed the status of a global language now. To many economists, cultural theorists and political scientists, the 'new world order' in the 21st century will represent a significant discontinuity with previous centuries. The 'Internet' and related 'Information Technologies' may upset the traditional patterns of communication upon which institutional and national cultures have been built (Graddol 3).

Teeler and Gray remark (1-2) that because of its origin in the US, most of the communication via internet takes place in English in spite of, or perhaps due to, the multilingual nature of its uses. Researchers suggest that this will change once the Internet becomes more popular, but for the moment English is the common language.... These give rise to new vocabularies, grammatical forms and ways of speaking and writing. The language will grow in usage and variety, yet simultaneously will diminish in its relative global importance. We may find the hegemony of English replaced by an oligarchy of languages, including Spanish and Chinese. To put in economic terms, the size of the global market for the English language may increase in absolute terms, but its market share will probably fall (Graddol 2-3). Crystal in this context observes (138-139):

The future of English will be more complex, more demanding of understanding and more challenging for native speakers and second language users of English. There has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. There are therefore no precedents to help us to see what happens to a language when it achieves genuine world status.



1.3 Scope of ICT in Education and ELT in India

The acronym ICT has been in vogue among academic researchers since 1980s, but it became popular after it was used in a report to the UK Government by Dennis Stevenson in 1997 and in the 'Revised National Curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland' in 2000 ("ICT in Education"/web). Since then there have been numerous developments in the perception and practice of IT in Education including the addition of 'communication' to the acronym. To Loveless, "Today, ICT lies at the heart of policy making in education" (*The Role of ICT* 37). And this change in attitude forms the basis of her fully updated second edition titled *The Role of ICT* (2003) as well as her other book *ICT, Pedagogy and the Curriculum* (2001). To her (Loveless and Ellis, *Editors' Introduction* 5-6).

The penetration of ICT in culture, pedagogy and curriculum will provoke a variety of images of teachers, learners and knowledge... We believe that the interactions between learners, teachers and knowledge will be far more complex, engaging and unpredictable in an ICT age.

It is painfully apparent that post-independent Indian Education system has failed to provide qualitative and meaningful education to every child born after the nation's 'midnight tryst with destiny'. But within the grove of the academia and the drawing rooms of the intelligentsia, there's rising expectation that the new wonder Information Technology (IT) may succeed where our system has failed (Shuchi, "Efficient Technology Usage in Classrooms" 40). So it is very relevant to apply ICT in Education and ELT to improve standards in curriculum framing and functioning in India, especially in Higher Education field.

1.4 The Role of ICT to Improve Communication Skills of Higher Education Students

In today's world, the modes of transmission of knowledge, such as teaching and learning, tend to be replaced by the modes which emphasize information processing and knowledge construction. Such innovative approaches using ICT aim at making learners play the role of an active constructor of knowledge. There is a great possibility for the application of ICT at Higher Education level, as it will promote self-instruction and help to improve skills in English (LSRW), particularly listening and speaking skills in communicative method classrooms in India, especially in Kerala.

Nowadays most of the Higher Education students in Kerala can read and write well in English, but they have less communicative competence as they neglect listening and speaking opportunities in and outside the classroom. They can't make out the English language used by the native speakers of English as they are not exposed to it. An oral communicative ambience should be introduced in classrooms to make English Language Teaching (ELT) more effective and beneficial to the growing young minds of the nation. It



is assumed that technology enhanced teaching will provide ample opportunities for our learners to listen to good English and eventually help for better communication skills.

When language skills are considered, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW), listening and speaking go hand in hand as listening is passive and speaking is productive, in the same way reading is passive and writing is productive. There are many studies on reading and writing, but only a few on listening and speaking in India. So it is essential to investigate in particular how the listening and speaking of Higher Education students in Kerala can be improved/enhanced through ICT assisted language learning. The major issues to be discussed in Higher Education level in India are:

- a) whether the traditional teaching materials allow self-instruction,
- b) how far the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) promotes self-learning and what its advantages are over traditional materials, and
- c) how ICT (Information and Communication Technology) can be effectively used to promote communicative competence in Communicative Language Learning (CLL) classrooms at Higher Education level in India, especially in Kerala.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of Study Using ICT in ELT

Interactivity is the hallmark of ICT assisted learning. It is possible for parents to communicate with instructors and also with fellow parents as well as with other students through the use of web technologies. Learners have a real chance to use different tools to make their learning experience as close to face-to-face situation. The use of computers will enhance self-instruction of different skills in English, especially listening and speaking. The research studies conducted in foreign universities (UK and US) have found out that in order to attain competence in English, all the teachers and students need digital fluency. But in this era of IT/ICT revolution, only a few studies have been conducted in this area in Indian universities. Based on this assumption, the aims and objectives of this study are formulated as follows:

- (a) to present the possibilities and challenges offered by the ICT for ELT in India and Kerala and to provide techniques and instruments for the development of materials using ICT,
- (b) to introduce participants to the resources already available in the Internet on the ELT and to suggest ways of integrating and applying these materials in the classroom and in the curriculum,
- (c) to study how ICT develops LSRW skills in English, especially listening and speaking skills of Higher Education students in Kerala,
- (d) to find out possibilities of ICT revolution to enhance Communicative Language Learning (CLL) in English, and
- (e) to study the scope of on-line learning and on-line examinations in the higher educational system of our country.



1.6 Conclusion

As part of the investigation, a detailed and critical reading of the resources available on the subject should be undertaken. The study can also profitably employ 'Survey Method' to gather data from teachers and students regarding traditional and new methods of teaching of English at Higher Education Institutions in Kerala/ India. Data can also be collected from teachers and students about their attitude towards ICT and their computer background. The procedures may be followed in this study include:

- (i) Review of relevant literature (of both primary and secondary sources),
- (ii) Survey of the selected sample (among Higher Education teachers and students)
- (iii) Model teaching using ICT tools (experimental study in CLL classrooms), and
- (iv) Qualitative evaluation of the data (collected through surveys and experiments)

Finally talking about the reasons for adopting ICT in ELT, Smith and Baber's *Teaching English with Information Technology* points out the following reasons to incorporate IT/ICT in English teaching:

It re-awakes interest in teaching, it makes teachers more employable by improving their range of skills, it can empower a teacher and a learner, it provides access to up-to-date materials and straight-forward information, it can be cheaper than face-to-face teaching, it can help students study at their own pace, and it can be intrinsically fun and motivating (9).

In conclusion, they point out that "the new developments in Science and Technology ICT) provide opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centred, interactive, affordable, efficient, easily accessible, flexible and meaningfully distributed and facilitated learning environments" (10). So in this era of IT (ICT) revolution, ICT-assisted 'Communicative Language Learning' has great significance as it enhances the learner's communicative competence and enables authentic communication in English.

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