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INTEGRATION OF EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY FOR ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH USE OF LANGUAGE LAB

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Abstract:

This Paper probes into the Integration of Education Technology in the curriculum for acquisition of Communication Skills in professional studies. Initially, evolution of various tools of technology useful for language learning and varieties of techniques applicable for acquisition of communication skills are described. Process of integration of education technology is discussed in detail with aspects related to Pedagogy of language learning and strategies of teaching/learning through technology. Technique of using language lab with teacher's console is also considered to understand how to improve macro skills of language and how to track learning progress through language learning software. The Paper opens scope to rejuvenate the process of acquisition of the skills through using technology, prominently through Language Lab.

Key words: *acquisition of communication skills, education technology, integration of education technology, teacher's console and pedagogy.*

1. Introduction

In teaching and learning of English language and communication skills, many new approaches have emerged and still continue to appear. With advanced technology and globalized information, the teaching and learning approaches are gearing towards the incorporation of technology in the process of acquisition of the required skills. Especially in occupational courses like management studies, students are expected to acquire professional skills along with digital literacy and technological competence. In this twenty first century, it has been observed that there is a dire necessity for students to develop those skills which enable them to analyze information, communicate, collaborate and think critically. Administrators, teachers as well as learners together have to plan a strategy to understand techniques of acquiring the skills. Technology plays an essential role in the process of teaching and learning in today's knowledge-based society. The variety of functions offered by the tools of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can assist teachers to explore various techniques in their teaching process. The abundance of information can

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lead learners to implement these tools effectively in learning process. The learners can immerse in a more self-centered learning experience which can harness the acquisition of knowledge, skills and critical reflection.

2. Evolution of Tools and Techniques

Stepp-Greany (2002) found that combination of technologies such as Internet activities, use of CD-ROM, electronic pen pals, and threaded discussion increase students' confidence to be independent learners. She states that in a technology-enhanced environment, students who have control over their own learning are motivated to be "knowledge navigators." In her study, she discovered that, her students became independently resourceful in finding meanings of difficult words and phrases. Similarly Kajee (2005) reported that through her self-created Nice Net web page conference, many students feel that they have more control over their learning thus the students gain more benefits by accessing independently notes, formulating their own learning goals, and even recommending and assisting peers in their learning process. The students are not only able to learn independently, but also able to help others as they could see the improvement in them. Her study focused on the ways in which the tools, techniques, and applications of technology can support integrated inquiry-based learning to engage students in exploring, thinking, reading, writing, researching, inventing, problem-solving, and experiencing the world. Similarly, Bruce and Levin (1997), have developed the idea of technology as media with four different focuses: "media for inquiry" (such as data modeling, spreadsheets, access to on-line databases, access to on-line observatories and microscopes, and hypertext), "media for communication" (such as word processing, e-mail, synchronous conferencing, graphics software, simulations, and tutorials), "media for construction" (such as robotics, computer-aided design, and control systems), and "media for expression" (such as interactive video, animation software, and music composition). It made the learners to become multi-tasking and perform effectively.

The diversity of the twenty first-century classroom creates numerous challenges for teachers who might not have experienced the same diversity themselves as students. The teachers must balance the requirements of high-stakes accountability while meeting the students with diverse needs within the same classroom. The teachers can upgrade their skills and facilitate learning process among students through experimenting and experiencing the various functions of language laboratory software resources and Language Management System (LMS) in the communication skills laboratory. According to Ellis and Ryann K. (2009), Language and communication skills laboratory becomes an exciting place to learn when LMS comes into action. It complements Teacher's Console (an interface which helps in regulating the teaching module across the platform) and User Interface (interactive platform accessed by the learner). Working on problem solving and project development by using new technologies will encourage the students to develop not only the macro skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading

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and Writing) of language but also higher level thinking skills through individual and collaborative learning through the coordination of students with teacher.

3. Education Technology

The kind of technology used in the field of teaching/learning evolved as 'Education Technology'. Education Technology encompasses use of computer, varieties of software, combination of audio, video, multimedia and Internet. This development demands a teacher to play the role of a facilitator, but technology itself cannot replace the teacher. Gilster, Paul (1997) describes that the teacher's role changed from that of an "information-giver" to one of "designer" and "director" of instruction.

In this age of information and technology, concordance techniques and corpus linguistics are increasing in teaching and learning of English language, Communication and Soft Skills. Technology fosters the learning process and the skills can be practiced at different levels at different paces by each learner, thus it encourages individualized learning through customized program.

Modern language-laboratory with LMS provides an increasingly sophisticated range of functions that appear to have been designed to change or supposedly improve certain aspects of teaching/learning process. The challenge is to match the software and hardware with the needs of learners, to make the best use of it, to ensure learners acquire appropriate skills, to gauge progress and to plan for the continual change.

3.1 Integration of Education Technology

> The simple existence of technological tools and multimedia centers does not automatically lead to students' learning independently. Significant investment of time is essential for material development and creating an atmosphere conducive to self-study. Unfortunately, administrators often have the mistaken belief that buying hardware by itself will meet the needs of the centre, allocating 90% of its budget to hardware and virtually ignoring software and staff training needs. Margaret Honey,(2001)

It is important that administrators in education field need to look at the improvements in technology and student achievement integrated with classroom instruction. If curriculum is framed by integrating technological tools in the pedagogy, the learner will be able to explore more avenues for practice of the higher level thinking skills. The teachers also require appropriate orientation of the use of technology and its integration in the curriculum. Here is the proposed Pedagogy for learning language through technology.

3.2 Strategies of Teaching/Learning through Education Technology:

Despite prevalent access to technology and a desire to improve one's self, many individuals have a basic fear of speaking in English. The use of computer technology helps students gain

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confidence through "learning-by-doing" in an interactive environment. Driscoll, (2002) observes,

> Technology by itself does not guarantee learning. Rather it is in how teachers and students use available technologies that determine whether transformative learning happens. The four broad principles offer a framework to teachers for thinking about how technology can support their instruction are 1. Learning occurs in context, 2. Learning is active, 3. Learning is social, and 4. Learning is reflective.

To achieve the above purpose, in recent times, numerous models for learning have been proposed, such as Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984), Jarvis' model of Reflection and Learning (Jarvis, 1987), Laurillard's Conversational Framework (Laurillard, 2002) and Barnet's Framework for Higher Education (Barnett, 1990). Each model has a particular focus and emphasis, and is aligned with particular set of theoretical perspectives. To integrate various skills of language learning such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, various approaches are developed such as Task-Based, Project-Based, and Content-Based approaches, all sought to integrate learners in authentic environments to facilitate effective language learning process. By using an appropriate approach and model of language learning, Education Technology can be integrated for acquisition of the skills required for professional studies.

Though changes in instruction and use of technology can also promote a higher level of learning among students with different types of intelligences, technology is not the end goal of education, rather a means by which it can be accomplished. Educators are required to have awareness of using the technology and its advantages over traditional methods. Harris J. Mishra P. and Koehler. M (2009) expressed that if there is a lack in either of these areas, technology will be seen as a hindrance and not a benefit to the goals of teaching.

Implementation of technology in learning process and performance of learners can be tested and evaluated to understand its impact, but assessment processes are based on standardized tests and the ability to complete these uniform tests, regardless of one's preferred learning style. This is a barrier for evaluation of learner because it prevents the full integration of technology into the curriculum. The ability to learn through inquiry, and the collaborative problem-solving skills, which prove to be essential traits needed in the twenty-first century cannot be tested through this process.

In this context, there is a need to frame principles for infusing technology into English Language Teaching to strengthen the process of teaching and learning. It requires amendments in curriculum and pedagogy and also integration of technology such as Language lab.

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3.3 Integration of technology through Language Lab

Language Lab can be used for teaching/learning through teacher's Console and Language Learning Software. It acts as a platform for learning, practicing and producing language skills through interactive lessons. It can be accessed through communicative mode of teaching. Where learners can act and respond in a variety of ways at their own pace.

Language lab fosters acquisition of certain competencies like, linguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competence to use both spoken & written language to use in a wide range of communication strategies.

3.4. Techniques to improve language proficiency through language lab

Learning Management System (LMS) used in language lab equips the learner with language to use it in variety of situations (real or simulated) covering the varied purposes for which they have to communicate in corporate world. In these activities, learners move from controlled practice of a conditional form presented in an Audio or Video form or Reading text or the combination of both to the activity in which they have to produce in Spoken or Written mode.

3.4.1. Practice of Listening & Speaking Skills through technology:

Teaching listening involves perception of sounds, stress, intonation patterns, accents, attitudes and so on, as well as practice in various styles of listening comprehension.

i) Purpose of listening and speaking task: Pronunciation through Phonetics, perception of content through Interpretation, understanding meaning of words according to the context.

ii) Tools for Listening and speaking: Language lab with teachers' console and student console, Acoustics through head phones, acoustic walls, ambiance for transmission and reception of spoken language like digital voice recorders and voice recognition technology.

iii) Method of teaching listening & speaking: Teaching vocabulary before a listening comprehension given makes the student ready to receive the content and understand meaning of it. Types of listening comprehension like, Listening for gist, listening for detailed information, focused listening and listening for specific purpose can lead the learner to practice the given text thoroughly.

iv) Outcome of listening & speaking tasks: Analysis of the speed and style of speech, the use of hesitation, repetition, false starts, paraphrasing and so on can also be rectified. Feedback can be provided based on the learners' performance in the form of writing or speaking activities like group Discussions, role plays gap.

Teachers can listen directly or intervene as when required to control, monitor and evaluate the process. It can also be recorded and saved for later evaluation using text, graphics, video and audio materials which can be graded automatically

3.4.2. Practice of Reading & Writing Skills through technology

Practice of the rules of grammar, vocabulary Lessons, grammar Exercises, interactive Stories/situations, writing proposals, reports, resume and so on can be done to improve the skills of reading and writing.

i) Purpose of reading and writing tasks: comprehension skills on reading and writing to represent the learner's perceptions on a given task are the main purpose of reading and writing tasks. Through such exercises, they can practice writing proposals, winning resume, reports and e-mails.

ii) Tools for reading and writing tasks: Writing Assistance, making soft copies of assignment given though using word documents, PDFs, excel sheets and so on. E-books, digital dictionaries, vocabulary building software can help the learners to augment the reading and writing skills.

iii) Methods for improving reading and writing tasks: The learners can be encouraged by allowing them to follow the different methods of reading such as, skimming and scanning, Comprehensions can be given in the form of stories, case lets, cases, descriptions and narrations. They can be followed by activities in groups through exercises on word meanings, vocabulary, fill in the missing information, writing summary / gist. Note taking and note making short report writing

iv) Outcome and feedback of reading & writing tasks: The teacher can send messages to guide learners with their work and learner can reply. The teacher can also initiate a text chat session with single & multiple learners. In this feedback can be given on the spot.

3.5 Assessment through Language Learning Software.

According to I Madhavi (2009), Exam module provides a complete interactive and automatic quiz module. They can contain text, graphics, audio, video in the quiz. This allows teacher to use virtually any media available to create tests and evaluate the learners. Speaking can also be evaluated through digital recorder module. Students' working on assignments or conversations in groups can be evaluated. .Reports and statistics for tests are immediately available at the end of the each session, giving the important details of the class, individual student and individual question in tabular, graphical representation or pie diagram model.

3.6. Conclusion

According to the current scenario, our teaching methods have to be modified. Integration of education technology through language lab improves the level of proficiency in learners. We

have discussed in this Paper various techniques to improve language skills through technology. According to the study, comprehensive language learning is possible through integrating education technology with classroom teaching. The learners can become good Professionals by developing skills if they experience through well structured & equipped lab with teacher friendly software, authentic resources, planned curriculum and implantation in an organized frame work to achieve success. Planned framework, tools and techniques can produce required results.

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