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Tools of Technology to Empower Reading Skills

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Introduction

Technology and education are highly intertwined these days. Used widely, technology empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning. Students are entering a world in which 60% of the jobs require technological competency, a world in which they must continue to update their occupational and technological skills in order to be successful. Moreover, today's students have a wealth of technology-based tools available to improve their reading skills. However, technological solutions to teaching reading need not be expensive. We must take advantage of the capacity of technology to enhance our traditional classes and to engage our students in active learning.

Importance of Reading

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Tools of Technology to Empower Reading Skills

Among the LSRW Skills, reading plays a vital role in achieving success. It is found that there is a strong relationship between reading and academic success. A student who can read well not only achieves success in his academic, but also in his career. Excellent readers can recognize the individual sentences and the organizational arrangement of a piece of writing. They can understand ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. Reading is a many-sided process that develops only with practice. Reading is basic thing in developing a good self image. All the basics in reading such as word recognition, fluency must be learned and mastered within a stipulated time. Reading may also be considered as an ability that comes naturally. Reading is important because words - spoken and written - are the most important things of life. Reading also improves the mind, develops critical thinking and also creativity skills.

Problems Faced by the Students

Students with reading problems lack many of the basic components of reading. Learning to read is a sequential process. Each step in the process relates to one of the three components of reading: decoding, comprehension and retention. These are the progressive steps in learning to read that allow us to move from sounds to words to sentences and paragraphs. Students with reading problems have difficulty in decoding words and sentences.

At a basic level, children recognize that letters represent the sounds of spoken words. As children master each letter of the alphabet, they map these letters to the sounds they represent. This mapping enables children to begin to decipher whole words. Students who decode easily hear these three sounds because the brain automatically separates them. With practice, decoding becomes automatic for the normally progressing reader. Students see words and read them without struggling, even if they do not know the meaning of every word. Students with reading problems have difficulty in comprehending material that they read. Comprehension ultimately depends on the ability to decode and master right words. When that word recognition becomes automatic, young readers are better able to concentrate on the meaning of whole sentences and paragraphs while they read.

A student with a reading disability faces a complicated cycle of difficulty: he cannot read anything clearly. When reading becomes laborious and unsatisfying, a student will avoid

it. Over time, his comprehension skills decline and he becomes a poor speller and writer. What probably began as a problem with word recognition becomes a general weakness with both written and spoken language.

Assessing Technological Needs for Developing Reading Skills

Large percentages of students continue to score low marks in reading achievements. There is a wide range of assistive technology (AT) tools available to help individuals who struggle with reading. While each type of tool works a little differently, all of these tools help by presenting text as speech. These tools help facilitate decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension. Many of these devices also support increased efficiency, productivity, independence, and enjoyment (Bhattacharya, K., & Han, S. (2001). Piaget and cognitive development). In most instances, students use a combination of assistive technology devices to meet their reading needs. The types of assistive technology devices used to support reading are determined by individual student abilities and needs as well as the required reading tasks across all instructional environments. In this paper, technological tools are organized into various categories based on the primary features or applications to improve reading skills.

Smartphones in Improving Reading Skills

Smart phones promote a number of concrete skills among students. Implementation of smart phones in curriculums makes students to learn and participate in educational activities from anywhere, regardless of the subject of study. Research shows (Shudong Wang and Simon Smith-Reading and Grammar Learning Through Mobile Phones) that the kind of increased exposure towards smart phones can actually help to increase reading. Furthermore, despite the relatively small screen sizes, smart phones are often used for reading on the go. Research suggests that on average, 76.6% of students spend more than 30 minutes a day reading or sending messages on their mobile phones; and 79.5% spend more than 30 minutes browsing the Internet on their mobile phones. If students were to engage in reading activities on their phone for just a small portion of this time, it could be inferred that measurable improvements in their reading ability could be attained.

Students spend more time for games and phones. Motivating them to use it for learning seems to be a difficult task. Moreover making them to spend it for improving reading skills acquire higher-level task.

In the case of a class activity, reading a text under a teacher's supervision is obligatory and students are required to answer any questions posed by the teacher, whereas reading of essays or paragraphs or taking up quizzes in smart phones becomes easy for the students. Materials sent via email can be stored in the receiver's inbox folder and can be retrieved and accessed any time. Because students always carry their mobile phones, they can review the reading materials as many times as they want.

Mobile Phone Learning

The concept of mobile phone learning, although not yet prevalent, is likely to become accepted by more and more learners. However, the disadvantages of mobile phone learning are still significant. Students are not used to reading learning materials on small screens. Taking quizzes or answering reading questions requires them to scroll up and down. Students use mobile phones as their private domain that should remain disconnected from formal study. Most of the teachers and students accept the concept that learning should be done in class or on a personal computer, because mobile phones are for their personal affairs.

Changing this perception may require a shift in thinking as well as teaching. Indeed, given the high ownership rate of mobile phones, it is surprising that university students rarely use the mobile phone as an educational tool. When I asked students that how many of them use mobile phone for learning I heard that they have never used their phone for learning. I hope that this study will help focus the attention of other mobile learning practitioners to embrace a mobile phone learning culture. By working as partners with students, educational institutions can build an effective reading.

Electronic Tablets in Improving Reading

In classroom, learning activities using electronic tablet improves understanding skills, digital skills, creativity, independent learning and motivation. Most of the teachers who work

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in schools and colleges have the same opinion. During 2012-2013, over 2,000 pupils and 150 teachers in early childhood, primary, secondary and special education, took part in a study to identify the best learning activities with tablets, and the advantages and disadvantages of using them (Burns, P. C., Betty, D., & Ross, E. P. (1996). *Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary Schools*). The study highlights a large number of advantages in using electronic tablets, such as access to sources of information on internet, and, providing resources for different learning activities.

Furthermore, it is believed that electronic tablets direct teachers to apply student-centered, improving methodologies help to deal with diversity among pupils (by personalizing content and practice activities), spread digital skills within the family and help the use of collaborative information-sharing environments. The electronic tablets assist independent learning (as they provide interaction and tools), help develop pupils' digital skills, improve comprehension (through images, simulations and video), encourage creativity (by helping to find and organize information and discuss ideas), and increase pupils' involvement and motivation. When students read electronic texts they were capable of understanding the main theme of the text, but they were not capable of remembering the details of the text and at the same time, their reading skills are enhanced.

Different tests on reading were conducted in our college by some of the language teachers to determine students' oral reading speed and their reading comprehension levels. These reading tests included different passages. The reading speed of the student was calculated by the number of words read appropriately in one minute. However, this study found those students' opinions about the use of electronic tablet was significantly positive. In addition to this, students found the use of electronic tablets enjoyable. Further studies could examine students' silent reading performance and comprehension to determine reading difficulties and students' motivation for reading through electronic tablets.

According to the findings of this study conducted by us in our college, electronic tablets are effective tools for reading electronic texts. The availability, display quality and ergonomics of tablets have optimistic effects on students. Students can effortlessly read the text by holding the electronic tablet like a book. Electronic tablets can be used in both the positions either in horizontal or vertical positions, which positively improve reading because

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rotating a tablet to a horizontal position provides a wider reading area. Moreover, students are able to adjust the size of the text, allowing them to read more comfortably.

Computers in Improving Reading Skills

The ability to read affects students' progress in all academic areas. Over the years, many interventions have been developed to help students with reading disabilities. Computers play an important role in developing reading ability among students. In the 1980s when computers started to become commonplace in public school classrooms, computer programs to help teach reading became a growing trend in reading education. With the increased use of computers in the classroom came the advent of computer-assisted instruction (CAI).

CAI programs use different types of instruction, including drill and practice, strategy instruction, and simulation; they also focus on various components of reading, including pre-reading skills, word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension. As such, CAI offers a number of benefits to students and teachers. To students, it provides drills, exercises, and opportunities to practice reading skills; teachers find it helpful in assessing students' progress, diagnosing problems, providing information, and maintaining records.

Use of Computers

The utilization of computers in language teaching influences not only the efficacy of teaching but also students' language aptitude. This is an appropriate attempt to be made in order to have an impact on the troubles being faced. As the recent teaching aids, the use of computers is viewed as an effort that could change students' opinion on language learning. As operators of teaching, language teachers need to have skills to conduct computer-aided language teaching.

Even though there may be difficulties in the implementation steps, teachers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to match with the current educational needs that require more student-centered teaching.

Computers may possibly draw students' attention in reading and teachers in teaching easily use it. Students are able to concentrate on the lessons as the computer displays text and colorful pictures that will attract the interest and concentration of students. Computer assisted language learning encourages students to actively participate in class activities that are implemented during teaching and learning. People with experience reading on computer monitors have increased reading speed and comprehension levels (Dyson, M. C., & Haselgrove, M. (2000). Teachers should include the use of computers in the teaching of reading in a curriculum and not just focus on textbooks alone.

Eradicating Illiteracy

The application of computers in teaching provides time for teachers to improve student materials as well as plan and organize lessons using computer according to the students' skills. The use of computers in classroom must be enhanced and this can help in overcoming the problem of illiteracy. A successful education programme that would particularly address the problem of illiteracy is influenced by adequate learning media, and by the qualities of the teacher as well as students' own motivation to learn.

Computers provide direct effect on the world of education. With the Microsoft Word programme, computers are more widely used in writing and reading practices. With the development of computers in the society, someone who has not been able to write and read is encouraged to study hard so that he could read, write, and use the computer as a communication tool popular in the community

PowerPoint Improving Reading Skills

PowerPoint is a successful tool to deliver material in the classroom and persuade students' reading skills. PowerPoint is highly used to assist the teacher and the students in teaching learning process. The use of PowerPoint can be one of the important aids for teaching in classes. It makes the students feel more enjoyable in learning English so that the atmosphere of the class is more favorable.

PowerPoint plays a major role in the development of students' skill in reading. To improve students' interest in reading skill, the teacher should make the lesson more fascinating and competent to reduce the students' difficulties. As a result, the teacher needs an appropriate technique. The appropriate technique has a significant role in determining the success of teaching learning process.

PowerPoint gives a new strategy for the students in learning reading. PowerPoint stimulates students' interest, when pictures are included. While using PowerPoint students will pay much attention to the pictures, charts, tables, etc. In addition, the sizes of the letters appear bigger and highlighted which would help learning the words, spelling, etc.

Conclusion

Students may recognize more words when different tools of technologies are used. This was proved in the test I conducted by us. 100 words were shown to the students using computer, smart phone & power point. Students showed about 50% improvement in the recognition of words in the test conducted. Students were not familiar with the words in the beginning. Towards the end of the learning process, they learned to identify more words. After exposure to the words, different passages were given to the students. The students were instructed to read audibly a passage in two minutes. All students were capable to read more words perfectly within the time limit. Nearly 60 % of the students showed progress. The results indicated that students' reading fluency in terms of accuracy had automatically improved because of the use of technological tools. It is also found that the use of different technological tools were compact and accessible to the teachers. The ready-made materials saved teachers much preparation time. At the same time, assignments of various kinds were also designed to tell students clearly about their achievements. This is a very cost-effective way to improve their reading. The students demonstrated improvements in their scanning, referencing and predicting skills, so their reading comprehension became better. It is found that the tools enhanced students' comprehension of texts. Students utilized the tools to understand connections between ideas, guess the meanings of words, used contextual clues to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

The use of a variety of tools allowed students to interact with the teachers and each other well and had raised their interest even in learning the phonics rules. Students especially enjoyed the use of technological tools such as mobile phones, computer, PowerPoint, and electronic tablet. They also mentioned that they achieved a sense of satisfaction as they used these tools and they also mentioned that they have become more confident in trying to become most efficient readers.

Recommendations

Advances in modern technologies noticeably amend the texts and tools available to teachers and students. These technological advances have produced enthusiasm among various persons for their potential to be used as instructional tools for literacy education. Drawing on studies of e-reading technology and computer technology more broadly, they also reflect on the very real, practical challenges to optimal use of e-reading technology. Technological tools positively influence reading achievement. In general, tools-assisted learning is perceived positively by students as an effective method to improve their reading. At the same time, before launching technological tools, security should be carefully considered.

The teachers' experience of having the tools for preparing their lessons on CDs and on mobile phones is that it was an important addition to the technique of teaching English. The teachers were delighted to merge this form of technology into their lesson preparation as it was easy to use and they were sure of its usefulness. It was noticed that the students changed from being hesitant learners to enthusiastic learners and from slow to fast and confident learners. It is recommended that teachers should use only technological tools that support learning; choose evidence-based tools; provide technology users with systemic supports; and at the same time capitalize on the data capacities and volume of information that technology provides.

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