

Multimedia - A Panacea for Language Teaching

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Introduction

English Language Teaching in India has traversed a long course since pre independence. Yet the scenario in the teaching/ learning activities has not seen much of change and language teachers follow the traditional chalk and talk method. The advent of ICT and digital media has not been very influential in creating a revolution in language teaching methodologies. In the present scenario there is a dire need for a broader focus. Selection procedures like group discussions, brainstorming sessions, telephonic interviews and video conferencing make huge demands on the communicative ability of students during their career seeking endeavor. The goal of learners today is no longer to pass examinations but to use language for daily communication and interaction and their acquisition is now measured in terms of their ability to communicate rather than on examining their accuracy in using certain grammatical features. Media tools appeal to students' senses and help them process information easily. The emergence of multimedia tools can be exploited by language teachers for improving the communicative competence of their students. Apart from experimenting new teaching methods, teachers can apply modern technology to support teaching of language and linguistic skills. The tools include a network of computers and related software, VCRs, cassette players, and slide projectors linked together.

Attitude of Teachers

While language teaching with multimedia has been heralded by several experts and academicians, the contribution of multimedia in supporting language learning is not widespread due to the limitations and restrictions of learning styles, teaching approaches, and computer skills among teachers. Many language teachers do not feel confident operating computers and feel that they need technical assistance during the lesson. In addition, they feel that those technical hassles happen too often leading to frustration.

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However students prefer and respond more favorably to visual stimuli than mere traditional teaching methods.

Using multimedia for teaching language can ensure the advantages of authenticity, interactivity, various accessible resources, and combinations of pictures, sound and text. These modern tools will help us to fulfill our tasks effectively, and "create a new dimension for language learning and teaching as well as an additional literacy" (Schrum & Glisan, 2000, p. 325) only when teachers and students are in the right position to exploit them. Therefore, teachers should consider the following factors when using multimedia tools in order to fulfill their teaching goals: the type of skills be presented; student and teacher preferences and teaching styles; the availability of software and hardware; the physical circumstances of the classroom lab; and the type of video materials.

Computer Assisted Instruction

The language teacher can make use of an instructional package for the slow learners and the socially disadvantaged and motivate the learning of English with the aid of a multimedia computer lab. Students can initially be made to recognize linguistic structures and learn pronunciation easily. The primary purpose of this type of computer package will be to give instructions and place the responsibility of learning on the users and constantly monitor them to see that they achieve the goal.

Learners and the Package

There are three domains of educational activities: *Cognitive*: mental skills (*Knowledge*), *Affective*: growth in feelings or emotional areas (*Attitude*) and *Psychomotor*: manual or physical skills (*Skills*) (Benjamin Bloom 1956). Teachers often refer to these three domains as KSA (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude). This taxonomy of learning behaviors can be thought of as "the goals of the training process." After the training session, the learner should have acquired skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The caliber of students in any class is varied. So in every language class there will be a group of students who are slow in picking up the LSRW skills. The reason for the slow pickup may result from social, economic and psychological factors. Lack of motivation is the main cause of learners' apathy towards learning English as a second language. Anxieties, fear, lack of privacy serve as de motivating factors in the classroom. The big advantage of using the computer is that it

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gives the learners more confidence and freedom to manipulate the learning program with privacy.

With the above mentioned facts as point of reference a package can be designed to enable the students to gain footing in the basics of grammar and improve their **Listening, Reading, Writing and Spoken** skills. Prominence has to be given to the first three skills because slow learners gather emotive confidence to speak only if they are able to write correctly without grammatical errors. The tasks should use short stories and passages from literary texts for listening practice, and reading comprehension. The package should also enable students to sharpen their listening skills. The students and instructors need not have to meet at the same time, as the content can be stored in the computer or a CD. Each student can practice numerous times till they are able to do the tasks without mistakes.

The teacher in this computer assisted activity is a facilitator who provides guidance to the students for using the package. The learners can be given some passages to read. Following each text, some multiple choice questions will appear on the screen and the learners will then be required to select the best choice in accordance with the ideas given in the passage. In this task, the only thing the learners have to do, as far as the computer accessories are concerned, is to use the mouse. However, in more advanced language activities, the learners can be asked to type answers to the questions. In other cases, learners may be asked to copy the original text on a new file and prepare answers.

Limitations

When the task becomes cumbersome, there is a natural tendency among learners to get tired or bored, and succumb to any attractive distractions, which may result in demotivation. Therefore, there should be a motivational repertoire that includes several motivation maintenance strategies. There are two most important of these strategies: (a) increasing learners' self-confidence; (b) creating learner autonomy.

Conclusion

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Since the goal of Language Teaching (English) is to help students to communicate fluently in the target language, teachers should focus not only on linguistic benefits, but also on other benefits. A good teacher-student rapport and pleasant and supportive atmosphere is also essential. A Computer gives the learners an opportunity to check their spelling, grammatical, and comprehension problems in privacy. Ultimately, the success or failure of language learning/ teaching using multimedia tools can hardly be decided by the media themselves, but by other determinants like teachers' creativity and adaptability, students' language ability, the curriculum and the teaching goals as well.

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