ICT and Teaching English Language in Higher Educational Institutions: A Study on Its Prospects for Enhancing Proficiency

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT)is an integral part of almost all organizations and institutions including higher educational institutions. As such, the use of ICT in the classrooms is very important for providing opportunities for effective communication between teachers and students. Language teachers nowadays have the opportunity of combining a variety of materials to help them in the process of developing the language skills of the learners. Use of multimedia and the integration of computer skills in language teaching is the need of hour to prepare the students to face the challenges in the modern world. Computer skills should be acquired and utilized both by the teachers and the students if they really desire to attain a good command over the language in order to use it effectively in classroom transactions.

Keywords & Abbreviations: Multimedia, Stress, Intonation, Consultative, Pedagogy, ICT, CALL, ELT, ELS, ELL

Introduction

In today's world, English as an international language has gained wide currency for professionals, teachers and the taught. Keeping in mind the radical change in the pedagogy of English teaching, the educational institutions now require addressing these changes and use

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innovative teaching methods and materials. Just as books have served as a traditional tool of instruction, computers have become an enhancement to the teaching learning process. Computer enriched instruction has matured during the last few decades to the point where its instructional benefits can be tested and compared with components of traditional instruction.

Adaptive computer-based instruction is interactive and includes initial diagnosis, re-diagnosis, and arrangement of instruction. Computers can anticipate student errors, categorize them by type and provide appropriate remediation. Computers not only provide corrective and constructive feedback based on individual input but ensure that learners receive only those instructions which aremost needed. Another advantage of ICT is that it can help to develop abstract and conceptual skills. Moreover, computers can be linked with a variety of electronic media to further enhance their merit as educational tools. For those who enjoy a consultative approach, using a computer as a resource can be rewarding both for the teacher and the learner.

Objective

An effort has been made in this paper to discuss the following objectives:

a. To assess the use of information and Computer technology in teaching English in Higher educational Institutions.
b. To bring awareness and make optimum use of ICT in the form of computer, Internet, Blogs, SMSs, e-mails, E-dictionaries, E-encyclopedia etc. to enhance proficiency of teachers and students.
c. To facilitate the sharing and exchange of information among teachers through networking.

Hypothesis

a. Teaching English language and literature effectively is a challenging task. Even the teachers with higher qualifications may face some problems in classroom transactions.
b. Use of ICT tools can help the teachers of English to acquire a higher level of proficiency.

Methodology

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In this paper, a text-based reading methodology is mainly used. books, research journals and other research articles written on ICT and its use in educational institutions have been used as sources of study.

Analysis

If we observe the present scenario of language teaching in higher educational institutions, we have to confess that it is somewhat discouraging. On one hand, we have highly motivated students and on the other hand, we have misguided and unwilling students. A language teacher has to develop the receptive as well as productive skills of these mixed groups of learners. Teaching English language in an organized way has been a major challenge in India and therefore, the language teachers should try to make the best use of the modern technological methods like CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning). Thus, a teacher who has technological expertise can set tasks that extend far beyond the curriculum and make the lessons interdisciplinary, and interesting. Syllabus designers, language teachers, and evaluators must consider the integration of Computer Assisted Language Learning methods to prepare the students in this competitive world of electronic revolution.

Multimedia is an integration of sound, animation, stall images, hyperextend, and video through a computer programme. With multimedia a wide variety of media options can be packed together to make language learning more interesting. Multimedia networking also provides the ability to disperse information to a extended audience in office, educational institutions or home in order to entertain, inform and train large numbers of people in a uniform manner. In contrast to the single medium approach to instruction, an integrated CALL system is one in which several different presentational chambers are used to implement a particular instructional strategy.

In a large class, the relation between the time allotted for teaching English curriculum and busy examination schedule makes it impossible for the teacher to pay attention to individual learners. It also fails to give each learner sufficient time to learn the skills of language in an effective manner. Moreover, our education system is so rigid that a slow learner sits along with more competent learners and in such a situation he feels neglected and gets demotivated. Besides, this classroom set up does not encourage the slow learners to test their capabilities.

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On the other hand, if the lessons are computerized and each learner is allowed to learn independently, he feels no anxious urgency to learn mechanically along with the quick learners. Through the use of CALL the individual learner can perform acts like working, recalling, self-testing and redoing at his own suitable pace.

There are two types of Multimedia instructional materials used in language classes namely 'reference' and language learning packages. The references include Encyclopedias and Dictionaries. Encyclopedias are a vast collection of hypertext, scanned photographs, animations, graphics, human voice, music and video clips. *Encarta, Microsoft Bookshelf, Crompton's Encyclopedia* are some examples of electronic encyclopedias. *The Longman's Interactive English Dictionary. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, and Cobbled Dictionary* are a few examples of electronic dictionaries.

Besides, there are two types of language learning CD ROMs viz. general English and English for specific purposes. General English programmes help the user practice English by providing models of the language in context. Moreover, there is a record option, which allows a learner to record his/her voice and compare it to that of the model. *Longman's English Work 1&2,* Desktop editions like Vector and Libra are the few examples of General English Language CDROMs. *Small Talk* and *Business English* are the examples of ESP CD-ROMS. It is felt that if used properly and judiciously, CALL programmes can supplement textbooks. Therefore, computers must be integrated effectively in the language classrooms, and this must be made a part of the regular course. In CALL system, language is taught in attractive ways through games, animated graphics, and problem-solving techniques. As such, a teacher who uses ICT in his workplace can become a language diagnostician, software programmer, course content developer, performance evaluator and instruction designer.

Over the last few years, the study on ICT tools and information management in education has witnessed substantial growth. This growth has been extrapolated to the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). Several organizations and theorists have been researching on meeting clear parameters for effective ICT applications in specific learning contexts. It is observed that computer not only provide corrective and constructive feedback based on individual input but

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ensure that learners do not receive more instruction than needed. Another advantage of ICT is that it can help to develop abstract and conceptual skills.

Moreover, computers can be linked with a variety of electronic media to further enhance their merit as a resource and can be rewarding for both the teacher and the learner. Some technologies that can be used for enhancement of English Language teaching and learning are – Smart classroom, English Communication Lab, Multimedia English Language Lab, Voice Chat, and Server etc. Some other software tools used for computer-based language learning are – English Grammar in use, English mastery, Telephoning in English, ABC Vocabulary 1.0, Spelling 1.0, Grammar 1.0, Composition 1.0, Tense Buster, Technical report, Writer, Café English software, and Discovery Educational software etc. Some of the websites that offer online teaching learning opportunities are – www.languagebridge.com, www.onlineenglishteacher.com, www.englishstudyonline.com etc.

Conclusion

Although technology plays an influential role in the learner's educational and social development, it cannot completely displace the role of a teacher. The teacher's role may change, but we still need him very much because technology is a mere tool, and it only obeys the command of a teacher. He has to design syllabus, proper materials, clarify the doubts and assess students. It is worth mentioning here that if we do not make our students technology-savvy, very soon our students will feel out of place and their skills will turn out to be obsolete in the global scenario. Hence, syllabus designers, language teachers, assessors, and evaluators need to consider the integration of computer skills if they really want to prepare their students for this modern world of technological boom. It is a challenge worth accepting and it is better if we act fast.

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