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Enhancing language skills through multimedia-an overview

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Abstract

In the present scenario technology plays a vital role in teaching and learning process. Several tools such as internet connections and power point are used for pedagogical purposes. The educational technology such as technological tools and media assist in the communication of knowledge and exchange of ideas occur. At Present, the world has made remarkable inventions and innovations constantly experimented in various disciplines of science, engineering and technology.. The technological world with its provision of a suitable platform for learners of all disciplines helps learners enrich their linguistic competence. As the interaction takes place between man and machine, learning is free from restrictions of any kind. The role of technology especially in language teaching-learning is of paramount significance. This paper presumes the need for the use of multimedia in developing one's communication skills and sketches the hitches that arise out of its extensive use.

Keywords: Multimedia, technological tools, pedagogical strategies, academic importance

Introduction

The incredible impact English has made across the globe is quite astonishing and the status that English has been enjoying as a link language and official language in India is quite prestigious. It remains as a language with no parallel. It is needless to list out the importance of English elaborately, as it quite evident from its wide use in the curriculum in academic institutes in India. Due to the constant increase of learners of English, many a method of teaching and learning is experimented and implemented in order that the effectiveness of the whole process might be assessed quite objectively. The advanced methods of teaching with all the advantages and uniqueness are considered suitable alternatives to the traditional ones. The present teachers of English are under the purview of encountering new challenges. Traditional methods of teaching have paved way for the need for technology-based inventions on the concept that 'change brings about change'. As language functions as a link between persons, cultures and countries, developing communicative competence in language has become essential. Though English is an international and commonly used language, students of all disciplines are well aware of the fact that mastery of a few more languages, besides that in mother-tongue and English, adds its own unique value and has its own advantages. Since proficiency in a language has become highly indispensable for one's academic and professional success, it is high time that the needs of learners were looked into. Of various methods, the latest one that has facilitated language teaching is multimedia. This stimulates learners' interest in learning as many languages as possible, especially French and German, with a great zeal and zest. Of all foreign languages, the two languages which have lured the attention of all academics, and the students who have great aspirations in life and wish to come off with flying colours with the help of linguistic knowledge concentrate more on French and German than on other languages. Effective assessment of technology-based methods and its wide and universal recognition in the realm of language teaching-learning have further created greater scopes. Use of technological tools for further effective use of methods has become highly possible. It undoubtedly has activated the lingual senses of learners much beyond one's expectations. It further reduces too much of dependence of learners on teachers. On the whole, the impact of technology in language teaching and learning is quite noteworthy.

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Technology for acquisition of language skills

In spite of technological developments and the impact of it in teaching languages, there are still teachers, who prefer the traditional methods of teaching and they cannot be completely done away with, as it has its own advantages. But when language teaching is restricted by the book of arithmetic, learners might view it stereo-typed or monotonous, and ultimately learners may either lose interest in language or learn it in a mechanical way. Though traditional methods of language teaching prove to be fruitful, opportunities are aplenty for students to gain currency, hope in the use of language and wide linguistic exposure through the use of technology. There is also an easy access and a lot of scope for learners by learning any language through multimedia.

Teaching in any language needs suitable pedagogical strategies and none can deny the fact that research that takes place in languages is as much as that takes place in science, engineering and technology. Methods in hundreds and fifties are experimented to process well teaching and learning of language more down-to-earth and more practical-oriented. Significance of technology in respect of language pedagogy continues to grow. The world of internet has kept all linguistic doors open for the comfortable entry of learners at all levels and all ages to explore, in the best and easiest ways, the opportunities to develop their communicative competence. It is to be appreciated that the non-native speakers of any language are quite competent with the native speakers and its credit is attributed to the technological advancements. Language learning through multimedia has shrunk the world and established a universal unity in universal diversity. Multimedia has linguistically united not only people of the world, but also their cultures. It is also to be noted that man has developed interest to acquire mastery over languages mainly because of the wide use of multimedia. Multimedia plays a great role in promoting language activities, which, quite different from the classical methods of teaching any language, help learners to have a quick grasp over language. There was a time when the focus of the academics was only on native language and English, but the trend now has totally changed. The global market with its opportunities for lucrative jobs across the world has necessitated the study of language, which now has become quite possible through the use of multimedia. Any method of teaching these days goes hand in hand with technology for easy implementation or processing. And the attitude of learners towards the use of technology for language learning is highly encouraging. Thus, it is needless to state that those who ignore technology just ignore themselves and keep themselves away from academic and professional prosperity.

Multimedia-Based Language Teaching & its Application

a. Enthusiasm

The conventional methods of teaching are just kept under debates and discussion and technology-based teaching is under experimentation and implementation. Multimedia technology has its unique features such as audio, visual animation effects, easy access to information gathering, besides its consuming time. Technology with its speedy outcomes has created in learners' further hope of enlarging their efforts to hone their communication skills in English.

b. Promotion of Learners' Capacity

Traditional methods of language teaching have pushed learners under the notion that language is 'fully rule based' and that it is to 'be used spick and span. Such a wrong notion possibly might block their interest in learning any language. As language is just a tool for communication, learners at the initial stages must be motivated a lot to use the language, taking efforts up to their capacities and capabilities. As multimedia-based teaching and learning of language provides a congenial atmosphere, it creates a comfort zone for further developing linguistic competence. The considerable amount of absence of teachers during language learning further makes learners feel more comfortable. And unlike teachers, technology is available to learners for enriching their communication skills round the clock. Involving learners in various language activities such as group discussions, subject discussions, interactions and debates brings about the desired output, as it creates a suitable ambience for language study. Teaching through multimedia technology also enhances the creativity of learners and promotes their confidence level and linguistic competence.

c. Opportunity for gaining insight into international culture

Since language teaching using multimedia offers learners hope in plenty to go far beyond the text-books and hone their communication skills through well-shared experiences, learners gain the opportunities to have a greater in-depth into international culture. Language experts are of the belief that creation of real life situations and provision of experience make language teaching quite effective. The vacuum that is found in the prescribed text-books is filled with the availability of technology.

d. Improvement of Pedagogical Strategies for Language Teaching

Teaching through multimedia makes content rich and paves way for the best use of class time. It further improves the efficiency of the class room, involving both teachers and students in the language-learning process. The strength of students in any language class is considerably a little high, because of which, individualization of instruction may not be possible and besides, any class is heterogeneous and so instruction has to be given by teachers in accordance with the comprehensive level of learners in any class room that is normally controlled by teachers and text-books. But such is not much required in any language class that is operated by technology, aiming at developing the communicative competence of learners. Multimedia-based teaching language, unlike traditional 'chalk and talk' method of teaching provides sufficient time and space to learners, which, in fact, is a great boon during the process of language teaching-learning.

e. Promotion of interaction

The role of learners is stressed in multimedia teaching. It further promotes interaction not only with people on line, but also with those off line. As far as traditional method of language teaching is concerned, the interaction mostly takes place within the four walls, but it is not so in multimedia teaching and learning. There are possibilities for the learners to interact with any Tom, Dick and Harry in any corner of this globe. This global interaction not only enables learners

to develop their communication skills, but also strengthens human relationships beyond valleys or boundaries. All the four skills of language could be well-developed by multimedia. Teachers can just be facilitators during the whole process, without any need to chain learners with too much instructions or rules of grammar. Free access and freedom of accessing offer learners some sort of linguistic spirit or hope. Above all, there is no need for learners to learn anything by heart.

f. Context-based language teaching

Context-based teaching of language through multimedia has made L2 class interesting. It optimizes class organization also. The unique features of multimedia are viability and visibility. In language teaching through multimedia, illustration is another added advantage. While using multimedia software, pictures and images can be used to make classes more effective. Multimedia helps learners understand the lessons clearly. By the whole process, learners' interest is stimulated. As rightly observed by Zhang (2006:11.1) teaching with the support of technology offer students with authenticity of learning materials and an attractive and a friendly interface vivid pictures and pleasant sounds, which, to a large extent, sorts out the shortcomings and it spontaneously makes students get interest in enriching their language skills.

g. Adaptability

Multimedia teaching is highly flexible and accessible. It is clear that creation of context in classroom and outside class is possible. Multimedia teaching creates the environment to serve the purpose. The various problems of learners in language teaching can be appropriately addressed by teachers. In such circumstances, technology can be used by learners to their convenience and advantages like manipulation of network to contact teachers, and receiving of remedial measures through email.

Problems in Multimedia Teaching

Despite innumerable advantages in multimedia method over traditional methods of teaching English, there are some disadvantages that might exist during the process of implementation.

a. Replacements in Multimedia Teaching-Learning:

Multimedia assists in making projected teaching effective. Total dependence on technology might broaden the gap between the teachers and the taught and enslave teachers and ultimately reduce their role as teachers. It can be noted that a considerable number of teachers, though fond of multimedia technology, are not proficient enough to handle it with confidence, as many are either literature-based or language-based, not technology-based. Their focus is both on functioning of computers and on learners, or more on computers than on learners or unfortunately only on computers, not at all on learners. There is no direct interaction between teachers and the taught. Chances are there for teachers to become substitutes in language classes, owing to the dominating role of technology.

b. Lack of exposure to speaking

Analysis on communication by teachers is useful in communication and expansion of knowledge right from proper pronunciation of words to comprehension. It further

improves learners' thinking capacity and caters to the needs of learners to the maximum extent. Multimedia teaching retains the interest of learners in language learning. By favourable atmosphere by the mutual communication between teachers and learners, the ultimate objective of language teaching is well-served. Widdowson in his book 'Language as Communication' says that "the ultimate objective of language teaching is developing communicative competence".

c. Restriction for Learners' Thinking Potential

Teachers, through multimedia, can motivate learners to stand independently and solve their problems and online assessment of the output is also possible and time-consuming. It inspires their ways of thinking and identifying their style of thinking, strengthening their capacity to contemplate and solve problems. In this way, it is noted that cultivation of learners' thinking capacity must be the main aim of language teaching through technology and it should not consume learners' thinking time, analysing and interrogating.

d. Thoughts- Abstract Vs Imaginable

The cognitive process undergoes stages of learning. It is applicable to the learning process. The hope is that teaching enables learners to take up outlook cognition from perceptual recognition to logical and rational apprehension and from perceptual thinking to rational and logical thinking, which is one of the main objectives of language teaching. To create learners' abstract thinking, the multimedia technology gives easy but rich content, and with its great advantages, it stresses out the significance of developing communication skills. When the image and imagination in students' mind are displayed on the screen, their abstract thinking has restriction and logical thinking goes waste, and now lack of learners' reading skills has created a gap in developing language skills and subsequently textual words are replaced by sounds and images, handwriting by keyboard input. Above all these, multimedia functions as a tool for assessment and it cannot and should not completely replace the great role played by teachers and that involves the complete teaching process.

Recommendations and remedies

While teaching, it is not proper for one to duplicate the text material to the screen in order to ignore position of teachers. To ascertain the successful function of multimedia teaching, one needs to take cognizance of the following.

a. Teachers Vs Machines

It is, by means of observation and practice quite obvious that application of multimedia technology could bring about breakthroughs in language teaching. In short, during multimedia-based language teaching, the role of teachers is very vital that they are not substitutes to machines. Suitable introduction for each lesson matters a lot in language teaching and learning. That can be well-done by man, not by machine. And like teachers, machine cannot be quickly sensitive to the timely needs of learners. Multimedia is an instrument for assisting language teaching and serves teachers, in spite of its greater effects. Therefore, teaching determines whether multimedia can be used or not. Otherwise, the teacher's role might be just display of screen.

b. Computer Screen Vs Blackboard

Many a teacher uses computer screen as blackboard and they upload exercises, questions, answers and lesson plans fed into the system and use them one after the other, without taking down anything on the blackboard. It is apparent that teachers can simulate situations based on teaching and make learners communicate effectively through the target language. In addition to that, use of blackboard is concise and teachers could make adjustments if and when necessary. Further, teachers with old heads on young shoulders are aware that a perfect courseware is ideal in mind, and that in practice, they need to modify and make the content rich on the blackboard with suitable questions from learners.

c. Learners' Thoughts and Practices

Now, the main focus of multimedia is on image and animation of teaching materials in order to create visual and audio effects and it makes teaching understandable. One of the possible problems is that display of content in PPT courseware does not take the place of learners' thinking in certain circumstance. Working on the utilization of courseware, one needs to encourage learners to make use of their own mind and speak more, actively partake in language activities.

d. Excess use of Multimedia

Some of the teachers possess the concept that is not proper and consequently the outcome might be adverse in effects. There is also a belief that more utilization of multimedia technology may create the appropriate ambience for language teaching and learning and learners get involved in class activities, the more easily the material access to them. Learners quite apparently show some curiosity in leaning, but actually, they feel like looking on. Excess use of multimedia might affect their eyes and may develop in them some sort of aversion and the freedom in the absence of teachers might be misused by learners.

Conclusion

Teaching by multimedia motivates the learners in the best possible ways. It also paves way for their active involvement in various language activities that are carried out through technology. With regard to development of technology, one can have hope that the usage of multimedia for language teaching and learning shall have its further beam. Now a days, in the fast moving world, the learners want to acquire knowledge in a short span of time. Thus Language learning must be more learners oriented in order that the objectives of language teaching and learning are well-served, but consuming less time. Hence the quality of language teaching and learning shall be improved and learners' skills are developed as expected through the effective use of technology.

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