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Use of multimedia for improving language skills

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Abstract

In the present instructional set-up, technology and its application have emerged as the trendsetter for the benefit it provides in the language teaching field. The present paper discusses the need for the multimedia components in enhancing the communication skills of the learners where the traditional language teaching methods fail in equipping the learners for the communication challenges of the ICT era. Interactive program can create learning situations of great fidelity and authenticity, both through presentation of regalia and through audio and video input. Multimedia learning also facilitates interactivity, flexibility and learner autonomy.

Keywords: Digital language lab, ICT, Interactive multimedia, software

Introduction

The world witnessed changes in all spheres of life since the existence of mankind. All these changes create an consciousness to learn, invent and perfect everything which ultimately results in the development of the species. These changes are endlessly taking place towards improving the life style of mankind, which ultimately have helped to mould him from the Rude to a machinelike. In all the magnificent and gradual development of human life, communication plays a pivotal role. From the primitive age to the modern era, this universe has been relying on different modes of communication. Language has been playing a vital role in all such advancements. Role of English Language in the International scenario: It took almost one thousand years for English to emerge as an international language surpassing all the basic languages. Today, any progressive nation needs to maintain international cooperation and understanding. English stands as an unmatched language to meet this demand. In particular, the professional graduates are supposed to possess excellent communication skills when compared to others. The reason is so obvious. Most of them are selected to work abroad and even if they work within India their clients spread all over the world. Hence it is essential for them to have sufficient soft skills to meet out the industry requirements. In recent years, due to the placement concept among the students and academicians there is an ever growing interest to improve the standard of language teaching and learning.

Hitches in the Educational System of the country

The conditions of the teaching and learning situation. Are not conducive because of: The varied social, economical and cultural backgrounds of the students who pursue higher studies make it impossible to master the required language skill from the present teaching method. There is wide difference among the students in their basic education, which prevents any teacher to adopt any uniform method at the college level. The huge number of students in each classroom makes it impossible for initiating any novel method in teaching and for providing individual attention to learners. The present examination system is mostly memory based and aimed at getting good results, which need not be the outcome of knowledge because the performance of the teachers is measured only by the results. While framing the syllabus, the end user, namely the industry, is seldom consulted. Hence, the regular teaching items are inadequate to meet the customer needs. Students who aspire to continue higher studies abroad find it difficult to get through the TOEFL, GRE and IELTS tests. In particular, 'English' is neglected when compared to the other electives, because English score is not included for the overall aggregate or division. The English teachers are not given any training in the required area; hence they are still following the conventional lecture method at

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all levels of teaching. All the above conditions make it very clear that the education scenario in India continues to be teacher-centered. Unless this condition changes to give room to learner-centered education, the scope for improvement will be very less. Despite all these setbacks, the multimedia assisted languages teaching and learning will certainly pave the way for required meaningful changes, intrinsically motivating the present learners to acquire communicative skills.

ICT and Teaching Learning Process

The application of multimedia attempts to combine the state-of-the-art pedagogy with state-of-the-art technology. The major motivation for the development of multimedia teaching is the potential it offers for the bandwidth of information transfer. This can be made possible through the use of variety of communication channels.-textual, sonic, graphic tactile and so on.

In the latest educational scenario, computer and its application have been emerging as the 'trendsetter by and large for the benefit it provides in any field. The advent of the high-powered multimedia kept the learner close to authentic situations where learning simultaneously involved listening, seeing, reflecting, doing and participating. " This technology enables learners to communicate rapidly, easily and cheaply across time and space [...] opens a new dimension in cooperative learning in which learners work together in small group to accomplish the shared goals (Fjodor Ruzic P.179) [21]."

The culmination of these technological developments is a sophisticated tool set, which supports creation of rich environment for active learning. As noted above, most of the video, audio and graphics were produced to fit with the content and the context of particular lessons. In addition to the aesthetic sense, the wide range of exercises and interaction styles offer variety and demonstrably help to sustain the learners' interest to yield the desired result.

Multimedia additionally provides a further and more powerful dimension to communication when the control and manipulation of this meaningful information is passed into the hands of the learner. The ability to interact with these communication elements via interactive multimedia allows language learners to explore, discover, ponder, search, question, answer and receive feedback.

The multimedia language laboratory has some features that traditional languages lab cannot compete with. First, a traditional languages lab does not have the function of videos on demand. They provide activities related to pronunciation and other speech skills. Second, the function of multimedia lab is multiple. It also offers teachers more powerful teaching tools with the aid of modern computer technology. Multimedia can provide reference materials including encyclopedias and dictionaries. Then there are the other vast collection of hypertext, scanned photographs, animation, graphics, human voice, music and video clips. They also provide many menus to activate and link various programmes together. Encarta Microsoft Bookshelf, Compton's Encyclopedia are some of the electronic reference sources which serve as very good resources for learners not possible in the traditional laboratories. Apart from the classroom experience multimedia also provides a lot more through Internet, teleconferencing and video-conferencing.

Necessity of Multimedia in Language Teaching

Owing to the rapid development of industry and technology, an increasing need has been felt for improving the communication skills at all levels of administration. However, the teaching and training materials are not adequate to meet the demand of the industry. Hence it has become necessary to identify more methods to suit the present trend. It paved the way for the linguistics and teachers to identify more reliable, suitable and easier modes of teaching. The latest and the innovative teaching mode is the multimedia mode. It is however found that adequate and relevant instructional and learning materials appropriate to the present living environment are not available for guidance and practice. Many claims have been made for the usefulness of multimedia for language learning such as [it] "creates an education system that surpasses the effectiveness of every existing method of language teaching" (Young Digital Poland: 1995 p.o) "We now have the ability to combine these channels of communication in our delivery of language learning opportunities and to provide the chance for learners to control how they are combined. Multimedia applications are likely to predominate in the future of computer assisted language learning." (Brett, PA. Multimedia for listening comprehension, 1995, P77) [1].

The reasons outlined below are the significant advantages of multimedia where all media can be combined together to give the best results and appropriate media can be utilized according to the demand of the situation. Each of these delivers messages in a particular manner and can exemplify or elicit communicative language media; they can now exist within the same space as each other. The power and effectiveness of the "multi" media should be greater than the sum of its individual components. One obvious advantage of the use of multimedia is that the CD-ROM materials are capable of creating situations in which learners can interact with learning materials and reference materials. This control allows learners as individuals to approach the materials according to their choice and at their own pace, Learning using CD-ROM materials are not passive, and they need to think about the language, engage with it and respond to it. The active and involved learner is thought to be a better learner.

All language learners are very different in terms of their needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses, motivations, learning styles etc. The ability of multimedia to be used as a flexible self-study resource may be useful in accommodating these learner differences. Learners can focus on language areas that they decide they need help and ignore others. They can work at whatever pace they choose. As with all self-study resources the responsibility for many of the learning decisions during the use of multimedia is passed over to the learner. Naiman *et al.* (19n) reports that in their survey most successful language learners assumed responsibility of their own learning. Multimedia with its wealth of material in different media and its built-in feedback makes it suitable for autonomous learning.

In the multimedia-learning environment, the learners need not worry about their mistakes or weaknesses. Working in the computer environment is essentially a private affair. Only the learner usually knows the errors. There is no public loss of face at errors or to feel shy on what teachers to explore areas that they may not like to admit to not having understood and thus in a class situation taking up the time of

teachers and other learners. Multimedia software is easier for learners to access than other media or combinations of traditional EFL media once the software's navigation techniques are mastered. Learner's learning time and intake of quality of data would change depending on the efficiencies of audience. The multimedia components are tireless. They never get exhausted like teachers. The software of all descriptions can be run endlessly. The interactive nature of multimedia software and its ability to provide tasks, receive learners reactions to those tasks and provide an evaluation to those responses can all be endlessly invoked. Particularly, the slow learners can repeat the required exercise as many times as he wishes till he gets all his doubts cleared.

Undoubtedly, multimedia is capable of bringing authentic, lifelike, real world impressions before the learners to give the maximum insight, or experience in the subject or field in which a learner is interested. Exploitation of real worlds CD-ROMs e.g. edutainment CDs such as Encarta or Encyclopedia Britannica or Time almanac lead learners to engage with such authentic language materials. These resources materials sustain the interest; supply the learner a lot more information regarding the subject he is pursuing.

Other Ins and outs

Student work exclusively in the target language interference. Students receive instantaneous feedback during each exercise. In addition, there is a tutorial option, which guides students throughout the exercises and keeps track of screens. The program also has a voice recording option, which allows the student to compare his/her voice with that of the native speaker and a dictation mode, which allows students to write the words, phrases and sentences spoken by the native speakers. Instructors can select specific lesson groups, coordinate lessons with theme-based/task-based activities, and assign segments as a review of problem areas. Using the Student Management System, teachers can track students efforts, including time on task, material studied and tests scores.

In addition to the above, the multimedia resources available outside the classroom can encourage students to do extra work, play language games and hopefully, gain extra exposure to the language. Need of the Hour: As language educators, one should not ignore the educational application of the latest technology. Hence, the time has come for the language experts to explore the potentials of the available sources and exploit them to the maximum to upgrade the instructional strategies to enhance teaching and learning. Undoubtedly, one way of achieving this target at present is through multimedia and its manifold usage.

Thus, the people engaged with computers and techno-savvy educationalists should develop techniques to exploit the unused potential and to make them more usable by teachers and learners. Without such contributions and involvement, the use multimedia in foreign language teaching will turn into meaningless activity. From this it could be assumed that such a approach would be viewed as a viable supplement to the existing conventional modes of teaching, provided enough teaching materials are brought up to suit the requirements, including materials for self-learning. This type of technology-oriented teaching may enhance the motivation of the learners in their pursuit of excellence and in their endeavor to compete with the crowd of job seekers.

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