Using Technology in Teaching English as a Second Language With Reference To E-Mail

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Abstract

Technology can be quite exciting when it is used skilfully and it provides students with another means to conceptualize meaning, to exercise critical skills and to learn complicated and abstract concepts. Advancement in technology has facilitated educational institutions to integrate technology into teaching. This paper aims at exploring various ways to use email to teach English language and enhance better linguistic and communicative competence inside and outside the class and also to engage in material beyond the regular class period which can lead to unconscious acquisition of English language. It also changes the role of teachers, learners, and even the learning process itself.

Key Words: Technology, Teaching English, E-Mail

Today computers are considered as an educational technology tool in the teaching learning process. Most of the learners today are computer literate. Computers assist learners to work and progress at their own pace, and self-check is considered as an added advantage. It is also fascinating to see young and adolescent learners especially getting motivated and attracted to computer technology and posing a challenge to the teacher community. Nevertheless, it might be considered as time consuming for both teacher and student in its use to get accustomed to individualised learning and solving problems. Teachers who are computer savvy always have an edge over the rest particularly in preparing material like worksheets and tests.

According to N Krishnaswamy and Lalitha Krishnaswamy, "Computer technology provides computerised language learning *simulation*- a simulated context or a representation of the real world- so that the learner can perceive the 'reality' of the event." According to them computer assisted learning is student friendly because "students can select certain word with a mouse or cursor and get the synonyms, paraphrases, grammatical analysis, maps, pictures, audio rendition (i.e. pronunciation) and any other information like etymology, etc., within a split second. Students can read literary texts and call up all explanations (bibliographical information, explanations, interpretations, etc.) on to the computer screen."

E-learning can be conceptualized as a way of teaching using electronic technology to pass on the information to the learners in minimal time and cost to support and improve teaching and learning process. So that it might lead to effective measuring and evaluating the performance of the learners. It mainly refers to using electronic application and processes to learn that include Web-based learning,

computer-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. Information can be delivered through internet, intranet/extranet, , computers, I Pads, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. E-learning lessons are mainly fashioned to motivate students through content or to assist learners to perform in specific tasks or to enhance their skills

In the modern techno-savvy world, technology has been extensively spoken about and used in various fields of knowledge. Computer-based teaching aids have become common in the modern classroom. In the future too, computer-oriented education will occupy a prominent place in the second language classroom. However, it must be remembered that the quality of education that is imparted in the classroom will still be determined by the teacher and not technology. While adapting a new technology, Jones and Sato (1998) suggest that we consider the following questions.

▪   Does the new technology facilitate the attainment of course goals?
▪   Is it cost effective? Do the benefits outweigh its cost?
▪   Are the teachers ready to work with the new technology? Is any training required?
▪   Does it serve the needs of the teachers and students?
▪   Does it help teachers make more efficient use of class time?

In my view technology can be quite exciting when it is used skilfully and it provides students with another means to conceptualize meaning to exercise critical skills, to learn complicated and abstract concepts. Above all, teachers have to be willing to learn various uses of technology that can benefit their culturally and linguistically diverse students. A conducive learning atmosphere may exist naturally between students and teacher because in the past, educational institutions were places in which the people of authority finalized what and when content was covered; but with the explosion of knowledge through technology students access information that was once under the control of the teacher, on their own.

With this as a basis, I find that e-mail; a sub-part of the computer, is one of the easiest ways for the language teacher interested in e-learning and the simplest tool available to the language learner interested in computer technology. Use of internet has become cost effective and is within the reach of students at home, in cyber centres and in educational organizations. Email could be used to give and correct students' assignments in the form of email or written in MS Word or Word Processor and can be mailed as an attachment in addition to pictures, audio files or even web pages. Students not only collect and share information at the cognitive level and develop linguistic and communicative ability but also develop their affective factors such as learner's autonomy, confidence, involvement, inter-personal relationship, sense of achievement, interest and enjoyment in learning and finally, an increase in commitment to the learning task.

Use of email in the acquisition of second language skills can make the learner more active and learner centred which will "enable the students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and give them the power to fulfil that responsibility" (Sosabowski et al.1998:2). Email can be effectively used in group activities to learn and transmit linguistic

skills and information to others and can lead to knowledge sharing. Language skills can be integrated in the learning process with the help of email. According to Lewis. P (1997) "Grammar skills can also be demonstrated and reinforced using computers. The teacher can direct students to somehow highlight a specific part of speech (e.g. nouns) throughout their writing. To highlight, students have a lot of choices, such as underlining, italicizing, or changing the font size, colour or type. Using a computer as a medium for studying grammar is much more motivating for a student as opposed to writing with a pencil."

Finally computer-assisted instruction has facilitated learning in many ways. Email can help in vocabulary development, verbal language development, reading and writing. Email is only a tool to teach English language learners as they develop their English language skills.

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