

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

PK PANDIA*

ABSTRACT

The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in learning various academic subjects, particularly, English is a very common feature in the modern age. English is a global language and the ICT as a delivery tool proves to be a boon for learning this language. It has benefitted with the revolution of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It is also because of the fact that the manual to operate ICT is normally in English and as such there is an added advantage to English as a language. The software programs are available in large number, and English being an international language has the global demand from the cross section of the society. Technological development through digitization and tele-communication has led to fundamental changes in production, storage and distribution of related study material. Now-a-days graphics, speech, sounds, still and mobile pictures can be stored and disseminated quite easily. The most frequently used tool for academic content in the academic institutions is the internet. Sound pedagogical principles underline the importance of ICT in learning English. The increasing use of ICT to enhance learning of English as a language is now a well-established fact. The educational system has also integrated the use of ICT in exchange and delivery of products (linguistic skills) and services (to be imparted and gathered) to clients (students and teachers). Several theories and models using ICTs have come into being for learning English.

KEYWORDS: ICT, Tool, English, Learning.

INTRODUCTION

There is a psychological as well as pedagogical principle that teaching aids can make teaching and learning very interesting, easy and enriching. In the modern time, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of teaching and learning, both in and out of the academic institutions. 'The role and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Learners Support Services is

an established fact now.'[1] The application of technology in a suitable manner while learning and teaching English can yield very desirable results. 'Education seems unlikely to escape the influence of technological developments...'[1] The language subjects have responded positively and quickly to the revolution of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

*Head, Dept. of English, B.T.T. College, IASE (Deemed) University, Sardarshahr.

E-mail Id: pkpandia2015@gmail.com

ICT as a tool is very significant but equally important is the operator who can make use of the technology to achieve the objectives. He can customize it to enhance learning and teaching. 'With the increasing reach of the internet and its growing popularity, the role of IT in education has a much wider scope today than ever before. The technology widens the scope of distant education as well as expands learning resources for all. As a resource, the internet offers search facilities in online libraries, mining of accessible resources, exchange of electronics mails and use of discussion groups and bulletin boards.' [2] The good thing is that to learn English, experts are available from all over the world. 'The expertise from around the world can be trapped effectively, with the minimum expense. In a large number of countries, the web-enabled education has delivery points at home, at neighborhood learning centers, at a workplace and on the move.' [2]

With the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a powerful tool, it is quite comfortable to learn languages such as an international language like English. 'The large scale use of IT in the education system depends substantially on the infrastructure and expertise which is or can be made available to educational institutions. Some institutions, particularly in rural and backward areas and catering to clientele with insufficient resources, would find it difficult to utilize IT unless support from public sources becomes available.' [2] As applicable on everything, ICT too has its plus and minus points. The rapid growth of ICT is also giving rise to some discontent and frustration at the local level. 'Communication (multi-media and cyberspace) are making massive amount of information available to everyone and despite globalization, conflict within local culture is on the rise.' [3] The advent of ICT is fraught with serious implication. It is giving more importance to machines than men, more importance to consumerism than to sacrifice. 'It is feared that

mass media will bring the culture of consumerism to the rural Indians and also raise their economic exploitations' [4] The 21st century has witnessed a revolution in ICT. It has affected the society in a big way. 'Today, expert systems and logic programs that mimic the decision-making processes of human experts in language translation, mineral exploration, business related activities and computer design. Artificial intelligence has found application in robotics, communication and other fields.' [4]

The ample availability of technologies is creating new opportunities to the learner and the teacher. Teaching tools facilitate to learn and teach quite effectively. Now a large number of teachers are equipped to use the internet and other tools of ICT. They have, in some cases, facilities both at their office or the institute and their residence. At the international as well as national level, efforts are being made to equip every school with internet facilities. The latest technology in the form of wireless is further creating a suitable atmosphere for the learner and the teacher. Now they can make use of the laptops networked together, making the students work at their desks without wires. When the laptop is linked with a printer, it helps the students to have printouts which enable themselves to have a hard copy of the instructional material. In the educational institutes, the pedagogue plays a very significant role in the effective use of technology. The application of technology depends a lot on the qualification of the teacher. The role of the teachers is a decisive factor in the use of education technology in teaching students.

POPULARITY OF ICT IN LEARNING ENGLISH

ICT has popularized learning English. It has left tremendous effect on pedagogy. It is being used in every walk of life. Science and technology are getting more sophisticated and advanced day by day. 'Telecommunications have played a vital role

in bringing about changes in global communication and defense operations. Teleconferencing, videotext, data transmission, computer networking, internet, microwave links, satellite communications and fiber optics have proved to be innovative technologies.’[5] The multimedia technology and its application are giving good audio, visual animation effects. These create a favorable platform for enhancing and exploring English and other language teaching models in a novel way. It is known that technology plays a crucial role in enhancing learning activities and encouraging students to learn the language in a very effective manner. Technological advancements have a bearing on the popularity of English and other languages. They are shaping the size and style of communication. The growth of internet has paved the way for a wider scope of the languages. Now-a-days even the secondary school boards have been making frequent use of the technology in teaching and learning the language. If any teacher wishes to avoid the use of the ICT, he will be left lagging behind and it will be very difficult for him to catch up the lost ground.

TEACHERS’ RESPONSE TO TOOLS

Teachers make use of various technologies in the classroom, depending upon their needs and resources. Some resourceful and well equipped schools are using interactive smart boards in lieu of conservative chalk or white boards in their classrooms. The teacher’s classroom computer is linked to the school’s internet connection and then interactive session in English language takes place quite easily. Students are encouraged to participate in the classroom session. The boards have touch screen technology and sometimes students are handed over the ‘remote clickers’ so as to act as controllers for responding to the queries expressed on the screen of the monitors. Teachers can make use of technology to add to more lively and interactive lectures. Many

technologies are available to facilitate learning English. Some technologies come handy while imparting distance education and some for teaching colloquial English, corporate English, functional English, reading, listening, interpreting or communicating.

There are also some pedagogues who ask their learners to sign up for email updates or text message alerts to receive homework tasks and also reminders for unit tests, projects etc. Some teachers give timely and adequate responses to such types of communication as a routine activity. In the recent time, some publishers have also entered into the domain of technology. They publish their books online and have interactive activities which supplement the curriculum being transacted. Many teachers have motivated their learners to go on line during class to complete their activities. They also ask the learners to visit the publishers’ websites and complete the tasks at their convenient place. Likewise, some of these websites and software enable teachers to keep the track of their learners’ progress.

EVOLVING ROLE OF TEACHER AND LEARNER

Things are changing at a very high speed and even the set-up of the office and the roles of the teacher and the students are undergoing a drastic change. ‘Welcome to the office of the 21st century. Sit down at your desk and turn the computer on. The flat panel and high resolution monitor welcome you with a good morning. Not only that, it displays your phone messages with the caller’s picture, phone number and message. The system has been programmed to evaluate calls and dispatch the non-urgent calls to your associates.’[6] Gone are the days when the teacher was the omnipotent and omniscient. Now the learners are not just passive recipients of knowledge. They are not solely at the receiving end from the teacher. They are at liberty to make their informed choices. They can generate,

retrieve, manipulate, disseminate or display, and share information. 'In future Indian society the education will be student-centered and not teacher-centered. Teachers will give opportunities and scope for teaching innovation and new ideas.' [7] The use of technology enables them to actively think about their information, making choices and practicing skills. Besides, when technology is put to use as a tool to enable students in performing genuine tasks, the taught can define their goals, draw design decisions and examine their progress. The teachers today are not playing their traditional roles only. Teaching is no more teacher centric. They are rather a facilitator, project manager, resource person, guide and philosopher. When students make use of the technology-supported tools, the teachers can keep an eye on the activities of students in the classroom and guide them as and when necessary.

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

Undoubtedly, the ICT is facilitating to sharpen the linguistic skills of teachers and the students in a big way. Almost every day new tools are emerging to enhance the knowledge of the language. The ICT is being integrated to have proficiency in the languages. 'Teachers will not be the only agents of education. There will be many more options for getting knowledge. There will be computers, televisions, cassettes etc to impart knowledge.' [8] Some of the modern tools in the ICT are as follows:

VSAT

'Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) satellite system is increasingly seen as a powerful distribution mechanism for Internet based resources, with ready access to interactive learning tools and e-mail, especially when linked or packaged with key educational web-site sources, servers and services.' [1]

ELECTRONIC BOOKS

Such books are created in computer readable formats on CD-ROMS or disks. Portable electronic books are created to read the disks and compete with paper based books.

MOBILE PHONE

Smart phones can prove to be highly useful to learn the pronunciation, grammar, and meaning of the word. They can also enhance the spoken English as well as the written capacity.

PC

PC is highly useful in learning English. The most obvious example for learning English is the trend of having the PC. The personalized computer is as mobile and versatile as its user, sending and receiving wireless data and accessing information from remote sites as well. It can recognize your voice, and follow voice commands.

INSTRUCTION ON GRAMMAR

Grammar is very important to learn any language and the system which can take the individual differences into account is the best. Customized instruction is more important than the general one. Some learners may have got command over the tenses but they have problems with regard to infinitives. As such, the grammar rules and exercises related to infinitives can best be utilized by those students who are facing problems in the aforesaid field.

MEET THE AUTHORS

Seeing is believing and libraries add on-line 'chat' capability. Users converse with the authors or other personalities using exit-to-voice and voice-to-text software.

BOOKS ONLINE

It is normally observed that supplementary and suggested books are ignored by the students and

the teachers due to a number of reasons including the non-availability of books etc. Even if they are available, they are merely physically present on the book shelves. But the online books page offers titles over 20,000 in its free digital library.

INFORMATION MINING

Libraries 'mine' the information in their areas from global data and information warehouses, compiling the information for clients.

VIRTUAL-REALITY HEADGEAR

It can be connected to a flat screen television with a menu of interactive games based on the language etc.

WEBSITE

When a project related to the creation of website is available, it can encourage the students to integrate the technology. The teacher can display the matter on a website about the class and the students. He can also display the information related to the students. The website can publish jokes, experiences, stories, poems, results, book reviews and original works created by students.

RESEARCH

Internet has changed the research system. The global wealth of knowledge is available just on the tips of fingers. Many a time the researchers are confronted with the problem of locating the requisite information. But the concern can be addressed with the help of ICT.

POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS

The PPTs come handy to teach and learn something easily. They can be made use to increase instruction in the classroom. The power point presentations can be created for necessary notes and for providing students the slides using the 'handout' option. This will prevent students from paying attention to simply copying the

notes only. Instead, they will listen to the teachers' comments and make meaningful notes in the spaces provided. The amount of information can be limited to one or two important points on each slide. The students can be encouraged to use the PPT in the classroom. The design options also add to the self-expression and creativity of the learner. The amount of information can be limited to one or two important points on each slide.

DIGITAL PRESENTATION

For students to gain command the research process is very important but the product of research is not confined to a printed research report. The learners can exhibit their learning in a digital presentation.

They can create a website or use a hypermedia tool, search as Hyper-studio, to create a standalone presentation. It requires students to quote their resources as they would be on any research project. It is also significant to teach them the significance of getting permission to use copyrighted material, such as, images and music. When you have a class home page, connect web presentation to your sites so that others can experience it.

REAL-TIME VIDEO-CONFERENCING

Video conferencing can be used via the internet and desk-top broadcasting technology. This saves time and energy and accelerates the interaction.

WEB-QUESTS

For language enhancement and exploration, web activities are very useful. A web quest has a number of questions and tasks. These lead the learner to the research topics through the internet. They can accomplish the task based on the research. The web quest can culminate in a product as simple as a one page document or as complex as a multi factual project.

CREATION OF BLOGS

Blogs can make students empowered to communicate their ideas in an interactive manner. They can be utilized for regular classroom tasks. After students go through a piece of literature or accomplish a task, they can make comments as the classroom blogs. This is helpful to such students who are otherwise, shy to share ideas in classrooms. As such, such students learn to share and communicate in a fear free environment. The teacher can review the comments and questions in the classroom, once a week or so. This can be used for the benefit of several classes. This can provide a platform to such students who are not present in the class as well.

WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Drafting projects may require multiple drafts. As such, they are well suited to use word processing programs. Drafts are easily made, revised and formatted using these tools. Its power can be extended to aid instruction by using the 'review' feature available in programs such as WordPerfect or Microsoft Word. The feature can be utilized for teachers or peers to interject connotations or comments, line by line, on students' work. The instructor can track the changes to evaluate how learners used peer review comments to improve or change their work.

ONLINE ASSIGNMENT

It is possible to have the online assignment through the internet. The teacher can have tests online through own websites. These require knowledge of the internet and now-a-days it is very common to use.

STREAMING MEDIA FOR ON DEMAND VIEWING

While web based streaming video is available for learners through a number of resources, most

educational institutions subscribe to a vendor who provides access to thousands of audio and visual resources. While it may be apt to occasionally exhibit a film of literary merit in its entirety, day to day instruction is generally increased using a short video clip. Streaming video enables quick and easy access to such clips. The teachers can bookmark or provide links to the clips and even integrate them into online presentations. Besides, in most cases, students can have access to the video clips as and when required.

CONCLUSION

Several researches have concluded that various tools of ICT are helpful in acquiring proficiency over the language. A student can find Information and Communication Technology (ICT) an effective tool to learn English. However, it is not an end in itself. When they are put to effective use judiciously, they can deliver goods. Both teachers and students can derive maximum benefit out of teaching and learning English and other languages. Teachers can make their students practically competent in communicating, writing, listening and reading properly. They can also go ahead with their research work and address the students' problems. Now-a-days pedagogues are in principle expected to be techno-savvy to make use of the ICTs while teaching students to enhance their knowledge and to create interest among them. They are, however, expected to have the confidence and expertise to make use of the technology effectively. It is also desirable that the institutions should have the software and hardware to enable students and teachers to learn and teach English. Practice makes a man perfect and the more the students use the tools of ICT, the easier they will find to apply the technology to acquire the knowledge and competence in learning the languages, particularly, English. There is little doubt that ICT has made teaching and learning very comfortable and easy.

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