



ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH VIRTUAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Teaching or learning English as a second language at class room is difficult in countries like India where multilingualism exist. Though the present world is a web world most of the class rooms in India are deserted and disconnected from the web current. Most of the institutions are not ready to infuse the modern technology into their class rooms or campus due to various reasons. They follow the very old traditional pedagogy. Language learning is a long term process. Developing the English language proficiency only at class room is not possible. The students or learners of English as a second language face lot of struggles in their learning process which is not associated with the methodology incorporated with technology. The learners should get awareness of the use of modern technology to learn English quickly and easily. The institutions should quit the traditional class room and adopt the techno-pedagogy or the virtual class room that is a wonderful treasury of knowledge. The virtual class room is not a teacher centered, it is learner centered where the choice of courseware, methodology, pace, place and time is as learners' wish.

INTRODUCTION

Every learner is an individual with different needs and abilities of acquiring language skills. Traditional method of learning language skills placed the teacher in the role of transmitter of knowledge while learners were seen as passive recipients of this knowledge. With the advent of virtual language learning method the focus is shifted from the teacher to learner autonomy, learner-generated syllabi, creation of relaxed atmosphere for learning and training to relate to need-based learning. As a result, the acquisition of language learning through virtual learning method is gaining importance.

Traditional Classroom Vs Virtual Classroom

In Tagore's poem "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads" the poet tells that God is not present in the closed dark room of a temple. HE is in the open dusty field where the tillers and path makers do hard work. He advises the worshipers to leave the chanting, singing and meditating the God by closing their eyes inside the closed dark room of a temple. He awakes the worshipers to open their eyes to realise that their God is not present there. He tells them to come out to find the God. The worshipers' aim is to reach the god and attained *Moksha*, for that they have to seek the right method of worshipping the God. Whereas the English language learners' aim is to learn the English language and speak fluently, for that he has to search and use the fine method of acquiring the language skill.

Traditional classroom is like the closed dark room of a temple and students are like the worshipers of God. The English language learners should realize that they can find a better learning out of the class room. They have to leave the dusty chalk, black board and noisy class room. It is a place of restriction for time, pace, place, choice of task, methodology, technology and freedom. It is a place of rules from entering to leaving the



class. More number of students makes more trouble. Class room is a place for teaching not for learning. It is a teacher centered not students centered. Generally the importance is given for completing the syllabus, students' physical presentation and maintaining silence. The aim of this article is to make awareness to the English language learners in the traditional class room to use computer aided technology in the field of language pedagogy.

Teacher Centered to Learner Centered

In a teacher centered traditional class room the teacher takes more time for teaching not for learning whether it is understood by students or not.. If the teacher follows the Traditional method or Grammar Teaching method which is old and the most commonly using method of English language teaching, majority of time is spent to explain the grammar rules by using chalkboard. Since students have to copy quickly what the teacher write in the board before he rub, chances are more to make spelling mistake and misunderstanding. So they get only stress and frustration not understanding and learning the subject. They lose their motivation and participation in the class room activities.

In case of following a Natural method or communicative method time for repetition of activity and practice is insufficient. A teacher has no time to give individual attention to every student due to more number of students, heavy syllabus and limited hours. It is a weary work to repeat the same answer, ask question and check every student to know whether they understood or not. It is not possible for the teacher to evaluate and give feedback instantly at the class room. In the event of clarifying the students' doubt teacher has no time to clarify the doubt of all the students. He will tell that it will discuss in the next class but it is not sure because of the heavy syllabus. Though the students understand the subject they have no time for practicing.

Tradition to Technology

Variable learning pace of peers is another major issue in a class room. A student does not have his own choice of study material and time. The curriculum is not structured depending on the students' learning pace. Teaching a subject is common for all students in a class room. Self study is not possible in a class room. The study materials in hardcopy like text books, note books and dictionary are inconvenient for handling and studying. The content written in the chalkboard and note book will not long lasting, it is not saved and secured. While teaching, it is important that same content should be at the hands of every student for better understanding. Referring different topic on board at a time is not possible. Bring back the erased content on the black board instantly whenever it is needed is not possible. Due to the difficulty of understanding the teacher's handwriting more spelling and grammar mistakes can occur.

It is a world of Technology. Time and technology decide everything. New technology becomes old as fast as it comes. It is important to identify and adopt the better technology for our needs. One who does not know the latest technology is alienated and his survival becomes impossible. So it is necessary to adopt and update the latest technology without fail. Though learning is not a mechanical process assistance of modern machines with latest technology is essential for developing language skill. Still most of the institutions do not have minimum level of modern infrastructure like digital language lab, computer, projector, Interactive whiteboard, CD-Rom, audio and video player, etc. They are not ready to install the new technology for various reasons. They follow the traditional method of teaching and use the old black board and chalk. So majority of time is spent for writing on the board and for rubbing. Finding a way to infuse technology into instruction not only helps English language learners acquire a second language, but also enhances motivation and confidence.(Lacina,2004; Lin, 2009).

Digital Pedagogy

Learning is a psychological process. The learners have worry and shyness in face-to-face communication but they do not have such problems in computer – assisted communication, which helps in free flow of communication in a stress – free environment. The modern methods such as CALL, MALL and



Internet for English language learning provide students new and effective ways to collaborate, articulate and voice their opinions. Learning is a long term process, it is not done instantly. It is done gradually and continuously. Teaching reduces the learning time by making the understanding quickly. Whether it is a traditional class room or computerized class room it is basically for teaching and understanding not for learning due to limited duration. New technologies such as Interactive Whiteboards and Wireless Internet have opened up the class room to the outside world. The learners can have personal choice of topic, time and place depending on their pace. The user friendly web-tools can be accessed easily and can get answers instantly. Social networking makes it possible for interaction among the experienced professors and learners even from remote areas.

Effective Use of Technological Learning Aids

Interactive White Board is a hardware that looks like a home theatre. It can be used as computer for presenting multimedia lessons. It promotes the students participation in learning. General computer tools like spell-check provide valuable self-analytic instructions. **Microsoft word** is used to learn typing words and sentences without spelling and grammar mistakes. **MS – Powerpoint** helps to make different style of writing process to present their thought impressively. **Collaborative real-time editor** motivates the ESL learners to edit their own writings collaboratively. Using this application, many users can edit the same computer file simultaneously using different computers.

Technology in using the social media is in many forms such as Social networks, Wikis, Internet forums weblogs, social blogs, podcasts, videos and social book marking. Social networking sites have broadened the horizons of the modern communication processes. The common platforms in the social networks have become very effective and easy to express and share one's ideas with the unlimited world. The popular social networking sites are Face Book, Twitter, LinkedIN, Google+ Orkut and YouTube. On-line discussion groups allow learners to communicate at different times and from different places, and the teacher can create own **E-forums** and social media applications such as FaceBook that allow online groups discussion.

Language Learning Applications

English language learners can use online dictionaries like **Lexipedia**, **Ninja Words** and **Snappy Words** to develop vocabulary skill. Snappy Words is a visual dictionary and thesaurus which can be utilized for demonstrative purpose. **Quizlet** is a flashcard creator. It includes many learning games like scatter and space race which make to memories more words easily and interestingly. **Word Bucket** and **Word-clouds** indicate the more frequently used words by their Font size and colour. Both help to memorize the frequently using words effectively.

Digital Storytelling is, mixed with text, audio, music, video, photos, silent motion pictures, etc, used to develop writing and speaking skills. It is an effective tool for the learners at the early stage. It will be easy and interesting to produce video programs with the help of software programs such as **Animoto**, **Microsoft movie maker** and **Apple imovie**. **Microsoft Photo Story 3.1** brings new life to traditional picture slideshows. **Photo Story** summarizes a particularly difficult concept or lesson. Students can work independently or in small groups to create a photo story project in any topic.

Video Conferencing is an application used for audio and video conversations between two or more individuals or groups. **Podcast** is a series of video and audio files which can be downloaded from the internet to audio players like Desktops and MP3 players. They are very useful resources of novel methodology in ELT to enrich the learners' vocabulary, listening and speaking skill with accurate pronunciation.

Social Networking Sites

Blog is a personal website or webpage. It functions as one's diary or personal journal that can be accessed by the public also. It records one's opinion and any information which is displayed in reverse chronological order. It develops reflective thinking, motivation and interest to write in English by connecting



with other sites and allows others to leave comments and feedback. Students who were absent and could not follow the lesson also able to connect with the other students. Assignment doubts, questions and important details of the lesson can also be posted in the blog. It promotes communication not merely among students and teachers but readers beyond the physical class room. "Blogging is a potentially useful tool for creating a space to discuss issues that may not be the focus of the traditional classroom" (Block 2006, p.39).

Facebook seems to be a blog which allows the people from the same group to comment and express their views on some other's profile till the user denies permission. The English language learners can create a Facebook groups for better interaction and understanding among them. It helps them to show their ideas and enhance the learning experience. Unlike Facebook, **Twitter** is a restricted medium for tweets in less than 140 words. Teachers can post instructions, links to online resources and answer class questions on Twitter. **LinkedIn** is used for communication more related to career development than social. It is also a paid account at some time.

You Tube is a video e-library. It is a resource to learn events, places, culture, technology and various other life topics in English. English teachers and learners begin to use it immensely. Tarun Patal points out in his paper 'You Tube for ELT' "You Tube videos can be used in an ELT classroom for teaching vocabulary, accent, pronunciation, voice modulation and whatnot".

Wikis is a Web-page or set of Web-pages that can be easily edited by anyone who is allowed to have an access. Wikipedia is a good example of wikis. The wiki is a useful collaborative tool that facilitates the production of group work.

Pennington recommends **LAN, WAN** and **E-mail** to develop writing skill. They promote students' collaboration, motivation and active participation more effectively. Woodin views **e-mail** as a bridge between the language class rooms and the natural settings.

Smart World for Smart Learning

After **Mobil phone** became an important part of one's personal and social life **SMS and e-mail** have become the most popular, affordable and easiest mode of communication. Both are very common mode of communication for personal and official purposes. It mesmerizes and motivates learners' to develop listening, reading and writing skill effectively. The SMS language breaks the grammar rules and develops novel ideas in spelling and writing style. Mobil chatting is also an effective method of enhancing the spoken skill. SMS communication promotes the English language learning in a very natural manner.

CONCLUSION

The virtual class room is a classroom in an eclectic way. The learners can enhance English language skills very quickly and naturally. They can create groups among students from various institutions who are interested in a particular field of study and post their works on the network and get feedback from others. These groups can come together by helping each other in learning and they can create sites where the latest updates will be provided and all of them can contribute to it. As a result the acquisition of language learning through virtual learning method is gaining importance.

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