EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING ENGLISH: TESOL IN THE CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is an effort to explore the impact of technology in the context of Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL). At first, it analyzes the background of the evolving field of technology in English language teaching. Second, it delineates the growth of English through technology. Third, it explains the various necessities of technology in teaching English. After that, it highlights the possible disadvantages of technology. Next, it explains the importance of striking a balance between technology and traditional teaching and learning. Finally, the researcher concludes that a judicious and balanced use of technology can procure the desired pedagogic outcome in the TESOL classroom.*

KEYWORDS: ELT, Multimedia, Technology, TESOL

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, technology has impacted every aspect of human existence. It plays a decisive role in human development, facilitating both social and linguistic change. Graddol (1997) emphasizes that "technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting education, work and culture". (p. 16) Consequently, it becomes indispensable to use modern technology in effectively aiding and facilitating English language education. Awareness is the key to determine how technology can add value in English language teaching.

The enhancement of technology in the new era has naturally assigned new challenges and duties on the modern English teacher. The role of the English practitioner has undergone drastic change, along with the methods and approaches to English language teaching. Technology provides a plethora of options in making ELT more interesting, innovative and productive, especially in the context of TESOL.

TESOL is a special context. Students learning English as a second or foreign language need specialized language support. They need to practice in hearing language, reading language, speaking language, and writing language in order to develop their experience and skills (Ybarra & Green, 2003). In other words, students need to perform various linguistic activities and tasks in each of the four language skills to enhance their linguistic competence. In order to perform such

linguistic activities and tasks, they must be able to efficiently use various technological tools which can help them acquire linguistic competence easily and effectively.

The notion of 'New Technology' includes communicative techniques for language teaching in which the personal computer is assigned a vital role (Davies & Hewer, 2012). Besides computers, there are numerous technological tools which can be utilized in the process of language learning and teaching. Every technological medium has its specific utility and benefits vis-à-vis the four skills of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Nonetheless, students should be familiar and well-equipped with the technological tools. This would help them acquire the requisite linguistic competence utilizing the technological tools.

The impact of technology has become phenomenal in the context of teaching and learning the English language, apart from the role of the teacher. Therefore, it can be implied that the role of the teacher amalgamated with the role of technology can lead to advanced learning results (Sharma, 2009).

Historical Background

For many decades now, technology has been an integral part of English language education. It has been rightly claimed that technology and English language education are related to each other (Singhal, 1997). In the 1960's and 1970's, language laboratories were used in numerous institutions of higher education. These traditional language labs consisted of many cabinets, with cassette players,   microphones, headphones and so on. The role of the teacher was to monitor the students' interactions, using a central control panel. The main utility of the technology was that verbal interactions of students aided them in learning the second language quickly. The skills of the students could be improved by providing maximum practical drill exercises. Despite the fact that the language laboratory was an encouraging step towards the integration of technology with language education, this technique was actually tedious and boring for learners (Singhal, 1997). In addition, interactions between teacher and students were minimal which also served as a major impediment.

According to Warschauer and Meskill (2000), in the age of audio-lingualism, audio labs were 'the best way' to use technology in teaching languages. In the 1980's and 1990's, the transition to communicative language teaching (CLT) changed the role of technology in the field. Warschauer and Meskill (2000) refers to four major types of technology to enhance linguistic competence :

1. Text-reconstruction softwares
2. Concordancing software
3. Telecommunication softwares
4. Multimedia simulation softwares

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is defined by Levy (1997) as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (p.1). CALL is a very powerful tool in language teaching and learning. The use of computers in the ELT classroom is beneficial for teachers as well as students. In recent times, there has been a plethora of software application programs such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation programs, spelling check, electronic workbooks, reading and writing programs. There are also numerous learning packages to assist teachers in executing tutorial classes.

Growth of english through technology

Globalization has enhanced the stature and significance of English all over the world. Consequently, the importance of ELT continues to grow, stimulated partially by the internet revolution. A study by Graddol (2000) indicates that there were about a billion English learners in the year 2000; but a decade later the numbers doubled. Naturally, there would be a further surge of English learners in the future. The study mentioned above also reveals the fact that 80% of information stored in the internet is in English. Compared to native users, there are now more non-native users of the language. Consequently, a wide diversity of context in terms of learners' age, nationality, social, cultural, educational background and so on, has become a striking characteristic of ELT in the contemporary world.

The rapid development of science and technology has brought provided numerous technological tools to facilitate English language teaching. Among these tools are online English language learning websites, electronic dictionaries, computer assisted language learning programs, presentation softwares, various chatting and email messaging programs, Listening CD players, numerous YouTube and other video clips, virtual conferences, language enhancing 3D virtual world programs, course management softwares like Blackboard, Web CT etc., mobile assisted language learning (MALL) and so on. Multimedia technology and its application to English language teaching have provided another powerful and effective tool, especially in the context of TESOL. It's audio, visual and animation effects set an interesting and engaging platform for innovation in the contemporary English classroom. Thus, multimedia technology has promoted language learning activities and innovative initiatives for both students and teachers in the TESOL classroom. Innovations in technology have fuelled the growth of English, thereby revolutionizing the way we communicate. The internet revolution has propelled the growth of the English language. Apart from computers, internet-enabled smartphones has further proliferated the entire process. Consequently, there has been a significant increase of literature vis-à-vis the use of technology in English language education. In these writings, technology has been accepted as the quintessential part of teaching and learning. There has also been a tendency to reinforce the role of technology in language pedagogy to the extent of obliterating the human role of the teacher. Therefore, it is paramount for English language teachers to be aware of the latest developments in

technology. This awareness will equip them to handle the technological revolution and help them yield maximum outcome in the English language classroom.

Necessity of technology in teaching english

As discussed earlier, technology has a plethora of benefits which can aid and facilitate English learners, especially in the context of TESOL. Some of the benefits are discussed below. It is imperative to emphasize that the benefits of technology are numerous and therefore not limited to the areas discussed below.

Enhancing the Level of Students' Interest and Motivation

The traditional methods of English language teaching may sometimes be dull and boring, especially in an EFL or ESL context. Consequently, stereotyped teaching methods and environment fails to sustain students' interest and motivation in the process of language learning. On the contrary, technology such as multimedia features audio, visual and animation effects, and can thereby captivate the imagination and attention of the learners instantly. With abundant information and the ability to transcend time and space, multimedia technology offers a sense of plausibility and uniqueness. This creates an engaging atmosphere in the classroom, which thereby helps in the process of creating and sustaining interest and motivation among the students.

Greater Satisfaction and Autonomy Among Learners

In the traditional English language teaching classroom, there were hurdles in building up an environment which addresses the individual needs and learning styles of the students. But now, due to flexibility and autonomy that technology provides, some learners no longer feel marginalized in the English classroom. It has been rightly emphasized by Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) that "multimedia provides the multiple modalities needed to meet the needs of students with different learning styles and strategies". In other words, technology integration in language classes triggers greater satisfaction and autonomy among students. In the past, in most TESOL contexts, learners' exposure to the target language was limited to the classroom. This issue has been successfully resolved with technology providing longer and a wide range of exposure to the English language.

Promoting Learners' Ability to Communicate

English language teaching in the traditional model rendered students as passive recipients of knowledge. This hampered their comprehensive and pragmatic understanding of language vis-à-vis its structure, meaning and function. So, the target of communicative competence was not realized optimally. Multimedia technology addresses this issue by integrating teaching and learning, thereby providing the students with greater opportunities to communicate. Various technological tools like the Blackboard, Web CT etc. stimulate the cognitive abilities of the

students, thereby allowing them to transform English learning into capacity building. Thus, teaching through multimedia technology has immensely promoted students' positive thinking and communication ability in the target language.

Enhance Students' Understanding and Exposure to Native Culture

Language is integrally associated with its culture. The comprehensive understanding of a language is incomplete without an insight into its background and culture. Compared to other forms, multimedia courseware can provide the students with abundant information, not only about the English language, but also about the culture and background of the native countries. The audio and visual displays, rich content and true-to-life language materials in natural, cultural settings of the native countries can provide a comprehensive understanding of the native culture of the target language.

Improving the Efficacy and Quality of Teaching

English teaching through the medium of multimedia can successfully replace the traditional teacher-centered approach, and thereby can potentially enhance the efficacy and quality of teaching the L2. Multimedia can enrich teaching content and can therefore fundamentally enhance class efficiency. The effective use of multimedia labs can provide better individualized and quality teaching. Compared to the traditional approach, multimedia technology provides experiences beyond time and space, and creates a more vivid and authentic language learning environment. It triggers the imagination and involvement of students, thereby enhancing the efficacy and outcome of the ELT classroom.

Promoting Interaction Between Teachers and Students

English language teaching through the medium of multimedia is student-centric. It gives prominence to the role of students and thereby promotes interaction between teachers and students. One of the prominent objectives of multimedia teaching is training the students to enhance their interactive and communicative abilities. In this process of training, the teacher serves as a facilitator, creating a context for language learning. Utilizing the multimedia in this context creation provides a solid platform for interaction between teachers and students. Also, it creates a target language environment promoting two-way exchanges between teachers and students.

Equipping the Course Content with Flexibility

One of the core advantages of using technology like multimedia is its flexibility in delivering the course content. It has been rightly emphasized by Connelly & Clandinin (1988) that technology helps teachers become developers of their own curriculum. Consequently, English language teachers can tailor assignments and instructions to create and sustain a positive interaction to enhance the interest and motivation level of the learners. The context of teaching through

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technology is not limited to the classroom. Technology like the Blackboard and WebCT provides learners with ample time and scope to interact and comprehend the course content. Learners can also utilize the network to contact and interact with their teachers, and also can receive answers and instructions.

Pitfalls of Technology in English Language Teaching

The technology enabled classroom is not an ideal environment for language teaching, and has its disadvantages as well. It has been rightly emphasized by Harrington (1993), Skeele (1999), and Sharma (2009) that there are limitations concerning the implementation of technology in the language classroom. Some of the pitfalls of technology are discussed below.

Lack of Humane and Psychological Conditioning

Language learning in a TESOL context requires a humanistic approach by the teacher. Psychological conditioning of learners minimizes the fear and anxieties of learning a foreign language among the students. Effective linguistic and psychological support is highly essential, which technology can never provide. So, it can be implied that technology, in all its forms, can never replace the teacher. The immediate mechanical feedback provided by technological mediums is no match to the teacher's warm explanations and humanized feedback. Naturally, the satisfaction and learning level is much enhanced in the process.

Leading Role Replaced by Assisting Tools

Technology is an assisting tool used as an instrument to facilitate language teaching and learning to yield the desired teaching objective. Over-dependence on various technological mediums may result in the teacher being subservient to technology. This may hamper the leading role of the teacher in the process of teaching. The entire of language teaching may turn mechanical and technology-based, and thereby the very essence of the leading role of the teacher may be neutralized. Hence, if the notion of 'creative education' is to be applied, then modern educational technologies should be utilized as assisting tools. It should be judiciously used as a means rather than the target, keeping intact the leading role of the teacher.

Minimizing Speaking Communication Among Learners

English language teaching should objectively target to enhance all the four skills of the language. The use of multimedia technology featuring audio, visual and special effects of animation enhance the interest and motivation level of the learners. But it also results in lack of speaking communication among students, replacement of the teachers' voice by mechanical sounds, and the teachers' analysis by audio-visual images. Consequently, the opportunities for speaking communication are minimized among students. The fading mutual communication between students and teachers is a negative outcome of over-indulgence in multimedia and other

technological mediums. If the ELT classroom turns into a multimedia show, learners would be turned into passive viewers rather than participants of linguistic activities.

Restricting Students' Cognitive Abilities

Developing cognitive abilities among students is one of the core objectives of linguistic competence. Teachers, through various teaching methods, encourage and guide students to think and develop their abilities to discover and solve problems. However, because of over-demonstration and pre-arranged content, technological mediums lack real-time impact and fail to provide crucial feedback. Moreover, it hardly provides instructions to develop students' thinking or ways to build their capacity for contemplation and solving problems. Thus, building students' cognitive abilities should be a prime objective of language teaching. The application of multimedia technology should not minimize the students' time and ability to think, explore and analyze the finer points of language learning.

Striking the balance

The advancement in various mediums of technology has permitted English language teachers to be more innovative and creative. Consequently, teaching has become more efficient and effective both online and offline. The application of technology has enhanced classroom activities, motivated students, and engaged them in constructive learning in a TESOL context. However, as discussed in the previous section, technology has its pitfalls also. If it is not used in a balanced manner, it can serve as an impediment, thereby hampering the process of language learning. Therefore, it is the prime responsibility of English language teachers to strike a balance to achieve the objective of maximum pedagogic outcome. The following strategies can help teachers to strike the crucial balance.

Providing Learners with Humane and Psychological Conditioning

Foreign and second language learning may instill fear and anxiety among learners. Therefore, teachers should not be over-indulgent in technological mediums overlooking the humanistic approach. Teachers are expected to provide psychological conditioning for their learners, which technology can never provide. The instant mechanical responses of technological mediums are no match to the warm explanations and humanized feedback of the teachers.

Keeping Technology Subservient to the Leading Role of the Teacher

Various mediums of technology are tools to facilitate language learning and teaching. Over-dependence on technology may minimize the crucial role of the teacher. Therefore, it is the utmost responsibility of language teachers to keep technology subservient to the leading role of the teacher. Moreover, the notion of 'creative education' will also be fundamentally applied when

modern educational technologies are utilized as assisting tools to be judiciously applied by language teachers.

Maintaining Equal Opportunities for all Skills

The objective of any language learning program is to develop all the four skills equally. The use of technology like multimedia, with rich audio-visual and animation effects, may sometimes neutralize the time and opportunity for speaking communication. Therefore, it is the duty of the teachers to balance the situation and provide ample time and opportunities for the development of speaking communication among learners. Teachers should ensure that learners become participants in linguistic activities involving all four skills rather than passive viewers of technology.

Providing Sufficient Opportunities to Develop Cognitive Abilities

Enhancing cognitive abilities is one of the crucial parts of the process of language learning. Technological contents are pre-arranged and lack real-time impact. It is devoid of any mechanism to develop students' thinking or ways to build their capacity for contemplation and solving problems. Therefore, the teachers duty is to ensure that learners get sufficient time and scope to develop their cognitive abilities. Teachers should make sure that the application of technological mediums should not restrict the learners' opportunities to think. Explore and analyze the finer points of language learning.

Judicious Use of Technology

Some teachers may have the perception that they would totally apply technological mediums in their entire teaching process. This may reduce learners to be passive viewers and hamper their ability and scope for meaningful linguistic activities in the classroom. Therefore, teachers should apply technology in a judicious way. In other words, there should be a judicious balance between the lively audio-visual impact of technology and providing them with ample time and opportunities for meaning linguistic activities like role plays, language games, group work and so on. This would serve as a comprehensive package for language learning and allow students for an all-round development of all the language skills.

CONCLUSION

Motivating, engaging and getting students involved has always been a challenging task in English language teaching, especially in the context of TESOL. Different mediums of technology has enhanced motivation and learning interest, thereby providing a practical way to get learners involved. It has promoted the innovative initiatives of the teachers and thereby has enhanced the

entire language learning process. Technological innovations have drastically changed the ways and methods of language learning and teaching. The internet revolution has further proliferated the use of technology in language teaching. One of the core contributions of technology is that it has provided greater satisfaction and autonomy to the learners. It has effectively raised the ability of the learners to communicate. In addition, technology has also equipped the learners with understanding and exposure to the native culture of the English language. It has also provided greater flexibility to the course content, facilitating both students as well as teachers. Overall, it can be concluded that technology has improved the efficacy and quality of teaching the English language.

Nonetheless, there can be serious negative implications of technology as well. Over-indulgence in technology can replace the leading role of the teacher by assisting tools, minimize the scope and opportunities for speaking communication and other effective linguistic activities in the classroom, and restrict the cognitive abilities of the students. It can also neutralize the scope of humane and psychological conditioning which the teacher provides to his learners. Consequently, it is of paramount importance that language teachers strike a balance between technology and traditional learning. Only a judicious and balanced use of technology can procure the desired outcome of linguistic competence in the TESOL classroom.

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