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Dr. Poonam

NET, Assistant Professor,

Dept. of English and Foreign Language,

SRM Institute of Science and Technology,

Kattankulathur Campus., Kancheepuram, Tamilnadu, India

Poonam.aprasad@gmail.com

Importance of English and Role of Technology in Teaching English Language for Engineering Students

Abstract: The face of education has evolved a lot with the effective use of technology giving way to more educational opportunities. The world of technology has a lot to offer for language teaching and learning. The internet, Electronic dictionary, Email, Blogs and Audio cassettes, Power Points, Videos etc. has offered an ingenious pattern to probe the new teaching model. The use of computers and telecommunication technologies to teach English is at relatively early stage in India but it has already started showing its advantages as it makes the task of acquiring the language easier, interesting and rewarding. The access to technology has brought a revolutionary change in the society. It has influenced a lot, the way people work and interact with each other. Even in the field of engineering education, the common means of communication all over the world is English, whether it is for acquiring knowledge from books or publishing their research reports, or for presenting papers in the seminar or for oral presentation and conferences. This paper analyzes the methods to assimilate modern communication and multimedia technologies in to teaching English language. It also brings out the problems of using these technologies and how engineering

students will be benefited if English teachers are aware of the strategies to use modern technologies in an effective manner.

Key word: Communication skills, English Language Teaching, Multimedia technology, Engineering students, Advantages, Disadvantages, Strategies

1. Introduction:

In India, majority of population visualizes only two career prospects to be successful. One is engineering and another is medical. As a result of which many colleges have been opened to cater to the needs of consumer who are engineering aspirants. Getting engineering degree is not a big deal now a days but landing in a successful company with a big fat pay check is a major challenge. Most of the students with engineering degree have sound technical knowledge but this knowledge serves no purpose unless it is communicated well. That is the biggest challenge most of the colleges are facing now. A good number of students, despite having good technical knowledge fails in the interview due to lack of communication skills as they don't have firm grip over the English language. Good or bad but English has become a language which has united the whole world with one string and command over it has become mandatory in order to succeed in this over competitive world.

One of the biggest field of study in the world is engineering and most of the works of research and studies are documented in English. For a successful scholastic life and prospective career it is crucial for engineering students to master the language English, as this language is widely spoken all around the world and knowing the language would open the global doors for them. The number of English learner has increased dramatically and globalization can be one of the reason behind it. So traditional method of teaching needs to be

more effective in order to satisfy the technically sound engineering students otherwise they might lose interest.

Usage of authentic materials in the form of films, radio, TV have been proved to be successful in enhancing the traditional teaching. The new technical era has designed new challenges and duties for modern teachers. Phenomenal entry of technology has changed the traditional English teaching immensely. To make teaching interesting and more productive in terms of improvement, so many options are provided by technology. One of the most significant drivers of both social and linguistic change is technology. Graddol: (1997:16) states that “technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting education, work and culture. The use of English language of social context, political, sociocultural, business, education, industries, media library, communication across borders, and key subject in curriculum and language of imparting education.”

As the number of English learner in India is increasing, different teaching methods has to be implemented to make the learning more effective. Multimedia in ELT satisfies both visual and auditory senses of students and enhances their involvement in learning according to their interest. Technology is utilized for the exhilaration of modern style and has been tested effectively for English teaching in modern world. According to David Graddol “English is the language at the leading edge of scientific and technological development, new thinking in economics and management, new literature and entertainment genre.... David Graddol.. The future of English, page 2

2. Importance of Technology in Teaching English

Over a period of time, with the emergence of technology, the use of appropriate technologies to instruct students and help them learn a variety of subjects from languages to arts and science, from engineering to law and to medicine has become boundless. Today, a

bunch of computer based and other instructional technologies is available for teaching and learning. It has a wide range from sample audio- visual equipment for use in the classroom, to computers, telecommunication technologies and communication satellites for video conferencing and online distance education. Computer hardware, software, communication accessories and visual systems enable teachers to present lectures as live presentation or as recorded lectures.

Due to emergence of technology the need for qualified teachers who are aware of usage of multimedia to teach English through new perspective has increased remarkably. As usage of technology in teaching has started from last few years, it has become difficult for many experienced and senior teachers to walk with today's pace and they still prefer to teach with traditional method. On the other hand there are many fresher teacher who use 'cutting edge' technology in teaching but lack experience. The amalgamation of both is the call of present time. Usage of technology in teaching English language does not make traditional manner bad or damaging, as a matter of fact, till date they have been proved quite successful and the current teachers are the product of those traditional methods itself. But, the world is changing, the requirement is changing and so should our teaching methods. In ancient times pupils were taught with 'Gurukul system'. That method wasn't bad as well but our teaching method evolved a lot from those times according to the new need of society. Likewise now is the time when our present teaching manner should evolve in order to cater to the needs of present scenario. Modern methods offer plenty of opportunities for students to gain confidence, practice and extend themselves. The problems faced by students who learn English as a second language can be easily dealt with the usage of technologies. Modern technology offers a lot of listening material in form of dialogue and stories which enhances the pronunciation of the student and which they can use and practice even after the classroom session. This practice helps them a lot in acquiring the language fast. Most of the students are

tired of traditional way of teaching and are more interested in doing exercises on a computer than by hand. This system works more effectively when the ratio of computer and student is 1:1.

3. Impact of Technology on Growth of English Language Teaching

In the world of globalization, English is considered to be an international language, along with it, it is an official language in the world, in the global trade and commerce, English is used as the primary language for most of the international affairs. In this digital age, to make software and to deal with various technologies and Internet, English has become mandatory. Many students look forward to go abroad for higher education, even there, whether it is medical, business school or advanced studies their medium of instruction is English. All the universities and colleges in Australia, The united states, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Singapore which are center of attraction for higher studies for international students they teach only in English. Journals, periodicals and scientific report which becomes motivation for many scientists, engineers, technologists' are published in English. It is English which makes a man confident enough to sustain the cut throat competition of the corporate world. Knowledge of course helps everyone to gain high position but unless that knowledge is broadcasted to others, it is not acknowledged. In order to prove your talent and make the world believe in you English language is required. In India its significance is amplified. Being vast country with various regional languages, it is difficult to communicate with people of other region as one cannot learn all the different languages. In such situation English becomes a link language, a language which is capable of linking the whole world together.

Over the years, English language teaching has been there with us and its magnitude continues to grow, fueled, partially by the internet. Graddol's study (2000) suggests that in the year 2000 there were about a billion English learners, but a decade later the number

doubled. The forecast points to a surge in English learning, which has peaked in 2010. The same study indicates that over 80% of information stored in the internet is in English. For the first time the number of non-native users of the language is more than native users of the language and it has become a driving characteristic of ELT today. The speedy development in science and technology and emergence of multimedia technology and its application to teaching, featuring audio, visual, animation effects comes in to full play in English class teaching and sets a favorable platform for revolutionizing and exploration of English teaching model in the new era. A teacher can encourage several activities with the help of multimedia technology which would lead to have a positive effect on classroom in English class. Students would be motivated to take initiative in the learning of English.

It is imperative for language teacher to be familiar with the latest technology in order to offer best to the student. Our biggest problem is that many teachers are untrained and unaware of latest trends and technology of English language teaching. Refresher courses for these teachers at national level can help in achieving proficiency in use of CALL. Teachers can also make use of multimedia technology to give more colorful, stimulating lectures. Unless it is done, students would not be interested in attending boring traditional lectures. The world is changing, the way we communicate is changing due to widespread availability of multimedia. It is high time for teachers to catch up with the latest technological developments and use it during their classes. A teacher should be proficient enough to create a balance between technologies and teaching. New technologies must be used in the area where they provide something categorically new but a machine should never be allowed to take over the role of a teacher or curb the functions of traditional ways of teaching where it has already been proved to be superior and more effective. The

ulterior motive should be enhancing the language of the students by selecting the best of both worlds.

4. Application of Multimedia Technology for English Teaching is Obligatory

4.1 To bolster student's interest

It has become a challenge for the teachers to grab the attention of modern day students. In order to do so the usage of audio, visual animation becomes essential. Multimedia technology promotes sense of reality and cultivates interest among the students and motivates them to participate in class activities which makes the learning fun.

4.2 To Enhance Student's Communication Skills

In traditional method of teaching, students are mostly passive recipient of knowledge and usually never get a chance to comprehend language. It is a one way road where a teacher speaks and students listen, making it difficult to enhance their communication skills. The multimedia technology has a lot to offer to inspire student's positive thinking and communication capacity in social practice. The PPT courseware activate student's thinking, group discussion, subject discussion, debates etc. promotes a lot of opportunity for communication among students and between teacher and students and helps a lot in taking away the stage fright and shyness from many pupils.

4.3 To Compete in Globalized World

Fluency in English has become indispensable in today's context where the whole world has shrunk in to a small village due to multimedia technology. Be it admission in

foreign university or taking overseas job, English has become mandatory as no other language is as widespread as this one. To excel in English language the role of multimedia courseware has become crucial as it offers the students abundant information which is much more than textbook. It improves their listening ability and increases their power of grasping information.

4.4 To Make Teaching More Interactive

Multimedia sound lab helps the students to enhance their speaking skills. It breaks the “teacher centered” teaching pattern and improves the efficiency of class by creating more lucid, visual, authentic environment for English learning. Multimedia teaching focuses on the role of students in interacting with others which helps in increasing class information within the limited class time. Major goal here is to train and improve student’s ability to listen and speak and to cultivate their communicative competence. The role of teacher in this aspect is of a facilitator who helps in improving language environment and motivates students to participate rather than being a mere receiver. As zhang (2006:11.1) points out ‘ through multimedia and network technology we can offer students not only rich source of authentic learning materials but also an attractive and a friendly interface, vivid pictures and pleasant sounds, which to a large extent overcomes the lack of authentic language environment and arouses student’s interest in learning English’.

4.5 To Introduce Adaptable Course Content

Multimedia teaching is also adaptable and focuses on the everyday changing requirement of students. There are number of students who are not comfortable discussing their problems during classroom teaching and are in dire need of teacher’s

assistance. They can easily contact their respective teacher through email and get their problems sorted out. With the help of multimedia teaching context can be created not only in the classroom but also after class.

5. Problems from Application of Multimedia Technology in English Teaching

Along with several advantages of usage of multimedia technology in English teaching, there are several problems existing in its practical usage. In many cases it is seen that educational techniques dominates the classroom making position of the teacher absolutely worthless, whereas multimedia technologies should be observed only as an assisting tool. The lack of communication is often observed between teacher and student as teacher's voice is overpowered by computer's sound. Cultivation of student's thinking capacity should be the major objective in teaching and multimedia technology should not take up the student's potential of thinking, analyzing and exploring questions. At present student's reading and writing competence has become a major concern as textual words are being replaced by sound and image, handwriting by keyboard and spellings get automatically corrected. Multimedia technology should never be given power to replace teachers as emotions can never be expected from machine, it should be used as an assistant to make teaching more appealing to the present generation.

6. Balance between Traditional and Multimedia teaching

The apt usage of multimedia technology in teaching is a breakthrough in class teaching but teachers still play a major role and their position could never be replaced by the computer. Traditional writing on blackboard is concise and allows teachers to make adjustment and amendment if required whereas this adjustment would take a lot of time in pre-planned PPT. The recorder plays a vital role in broadcasting listening material better

than a teacher. A teacher with their experience has to decide that in which area multimedia technology can benefit the students. Students should be encouraged to use their own mind and be eloquent and actively participate in class practice. Overuse of course ware merely in the hope of adding the modernized features to class teaching should be avoided. Piling on technology makes teachers and students both lethargic. Instead of focusing in the classroom, students only look forward to receiving material in the form of PPT and lose the essence of classroom. Coming to the classroom merely becomes an attendance issue for them. So it is in the hand of a teacher how to create a subtle balance between traditional teaching and multimedia teaching to make the classroom fun and interesting and help in enhancing the language of the student.

7. Conclusion

The academic life of engineering students is strikingly effected by English as engineering is taught in English and knowing this one language widens the scope and prospective of students. It has become the prime language for communication. Usage of multimedia technology in the classroom to teach English makes learning more student centered and consumes less time. “ ideally, the purpose of both the traditional and computer-assisted cooperative language learning classrooms is to provide a space in which the facilitation of learning and learning itself, can take place” (Shi 2008:76).

As the technology is developing day by day, even multimedia English teaching will develop a lot in future. In such scenario it becomes mandatory for the English teachers to update themselves in order to benefit the students. Perfect balance between traditional teaching and teaching with the help of technology will not only improve the quality of teaching but it would encourage students to take interest in language as well. In conclusion we can say that setting up the infrastructure for proper usage and availability of multimedia

technology in the college and not allowing teachers to be completely dependent on technology will be helpful and useful to ensure and fulfill an effective result of teaching and learning.

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