



Role of ICT in English Language Learning: An overview

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Abstract:

Current educational trends internationally call for language learners to be competent in ICT use. With the help of constantly growing ICT-based educational resources, language learners are able to learn individually and in personalized way also. The use of several media-audio, video, authentic contexts and real world experiences help language learners with different learning styles to assimilate the content according to their needs. The internet provides an easy and fast access to the use of current and authentic materials in the language being studied, which is motivating for the language learner. Such authentic materials include language labs, online newspapers, webcasts, podcasts, newsroom video clips, and video sharing websites such as YouTube etc. Chat rooms provide virtual environments in which language learner can practice not only the written use of language, but also practice speaking and pronunciation, without the fear of making mistakes. This paper will focus on various possibilities to enhance language learning with the help of Information and Communication technology (ICT). It starts with a brief overview of the different ICT-based tools that trigger language learning and acquiring proficiency, with a focus on different softwares. Finally, it deals with the use of different tools and their impacts.

Keywords: *Communication technology, English language learning, ICT*

Due to the influence of information technology on society and education, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is becoming the trend in foreign language teaching. Interactive computer network allows students to test the result of learning without the risk of being punished for any mistake. Learning does not have to be a pressure. Computer-assisted language learning can reduce the anxiety of students and turns out to be a positive side of learning.

In the present scenario, English is a tool to navigate the vast frontiers of all sections of life. The pride and quality of any educational institution or organization stands elite only when their students and employers communicate freely and effectively in English. Success in studies, efficiency in job, enjoyment in personal relationship, all depend greatly on the extent of one's ability to communicate with others in English. As the demand of English language learning is growing day by day, new technologies are offering new opportunities for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of language learning.

Language learning is an act of creativity, imagination, exploration, expression, construction, and profound social and cultural collaboration. If we use computers to fully humanize and enhance this act, rather than to try to automate it, we can help bring out the best that human and machines have to offer. Computers have been used for language teaching ever since the 1960s. New educational technology has significant potential for improving students' learning. The use of teaching aids has become more technology oriented with the introduction of computers.

The potentiality of computer technology in teaching is enormous. The basic features of computers like speed, memory, computing, accuracy, colour, graphics, animation, randomization, timing, etc. facilitate to present teaching materials more colorful and attractive way, to preserve the materials for future uses, to update them with little effort, to exchange the

materials with many users, and there by improve the learning efficiency. The computer aided teaching makes the learning enjoyable; it motivates the learners in learning; demands active participation; keeps the learners vigilant; saves the learner's time; and provides a better learning environment.

The main objectives for introducing technology-assisted language learning system are the following:

1. To improve teaching and learning by using computer as a tool.
2. To promote a self-determined learning instrument that can be used collectively for many learners.
3. To create interest among the learners.
4. To make the learners more comfortable while receiving the information or knowledge.

According to Van Brakel, Information technology is the gathering, organizing, storage and distribution of information in various formats by means of computer and telecommunication techniques based on microelectronics. The growing use of ICT in blended language learning environments has changed the face of language teaching and learning in a beneficial way and will continue to do so along with future technological innovations. Language classrooms are increasingly turning into blended learning environments that focus on active learning. It is commonly known that active learning advances the learning process and thus raises the quality of language learning experience. Blended language learning uses multiple teaching and guiding methods with online activities and utilizing a mix of technology-based materials. The use of several media-audio, video, authentic contexts and real world experiences help language learners with different learning styles to assimilate the content according to their needs.

As far as English Language Learning is concerned, a computer is of great help. ICT can be used for information. The Internet allows one to access a huge body of information, texts and ideas about teaching. If we consider the second use of CT in English learning: to produce a piece of writing. The problem most teachers face when it comes to writing is the reluctance of the students to edit their work before submitting it. Perhaps this is because the teacher is seen as a correction machine, or because students find it tedious to rewrite whole chunks of writing.

One defining feature of ICTs is their ability to transcend time and space. ICTs make possible asynchronous learning, or learning characterized by a time lag between the delivery of instruction and its reception by learners. Online course materials, for example, may be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Learners no longer have to rely solely on printed books and other materials in physical media housed in libraries for their educational needs. With the Internet and the World Wide Web, a wealth of learning materials and in a variety of media can now be accessed from anywhere at any time of the day and by an unlimited number of people. ICTs also facilitate access to resource persons— mentors, experts, researchers, professionals, business leaders, and peers— all over the world.

Use of ICTs can catalyze the paradigmatic shift in both content and pedagogy that is at the heart of education. ICT-supported education can promote the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that will empower for lifelong learning. These new ways of learning shift from a teacher-centered pedagogy in its worst form characterized by memorization and rote learning—to one that is learner-cantered.

In ICT-enhanced learning Learners learn as they do and, whenever appropriate, work on real-life problems in-depth, making learning less abstract and more relevant to the learner's life situation. In this way, and in contrast to memorization-based or rote learning, ICT-enhanced learning

promotes increased learner engagement. ICT-enhanced learning is also just-in-time learning in which learners can choose what to learn when they need to learn it.

ICT-supported learning encourages interaction and cooperation among learners and experts regardless of where they are. Apart from modeling real-world interactions, ICT-supported learning provides learners the opportunity to work with people from different cultures, thereby helping to enhance learners' teaming and communicative skills as well as their global awareness.

Language learning can never be restricted to a classroom environment. Learning process takes place outside the classroom too. An independent and interested learner is in need of resources apart from the classroom sessions. For them, ICT based learning has self-access facility. It allows learners to go ahead according to their own interest and pace. Learner will get motivated to study on a regular basis. The comprehension questions are presented in the form of multiple choices. If a wrong answer is selected, a special sound is played to indicate the mistake. When the answer is right, the next question will be displayed. Here the learner can use the mouse to move around on the screen and can select an answer by clicking on it. Score is given for each answer and is computed keeping the number of attempts the learner made. If he gives correct answer on the first attempt, he gets full mark. In case he finds out the correct answer in the second attempt, he loses some marks. If he fails in the second attempt, computer gives the correct answer and there is no score for the question. The comprehension test makes the learner to learn the language; he is forced to listen to the texts number of times and there by learn new vocabularies and structures. Computer evaluates the answer on the spot and, therefore, the learners can act on the basis of evaluation.

For Reading comprehension a passage is read with proper pausing and modulation along with the display of text on the foreground and suitable pictures on the background. Doing so the students are virtually taken to the place of incident. Following the model reading, question – answering section with multiple choice methods is presented to test the comprehension of the learners. This exercise is with time constrained. This exercise improves both the reading skill and using of punctuations.

Grammar section is presented in two parts: 1) exercise and 2) tutorial. A number of topics, which have been selected from various syllabus are presented. The topics like articles, adjectives, negation, possessive pronouns, degrees of comparison, questions, conditional sentences, direct & indirect, tag questions, past tense, subject – verb agreement, adverb, correlative conjunctions, gerund, active & passive and relative pronouns are included in the ENGLISHLAB. The exercises are presented in the form of multiple choices, fill-in the blanks, modification of text, say yes/no and select the correct one. Under each form of presentations a number of attractive and innovative methods have been introduced to draw the attention of the learners fully towards learning components. With the help of Language Lab learner can enhance his LSRW skills.

Mobile Learning, the Concept: Recent developments in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in general and global wireless technologies in particular that includes 3G networks, GPS, GSM, GPRS and satellite Systems And other communication technologies including Wi-Fi, WiMax and Bluetooth have created a wide array of new possibilities for the common man. When these technologies are used in the learning paradigm, mobile learning emerges. Mobile learning, or mLearning, has been defined as learning that takes place via such wireless devices as mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), or laptop computers.

The second dimension in CALL is mobile assisted language learning, which offers the opportunity

for ubiquitous connection with language learning materials and applications. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can be termed as a subset of both Mobile Learning and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). With MALL, learners are able to access language learning materials in their handheld mobile devices. It also improves connectivity of the learners who can now communicate with their teachers and peers anywhere anytime. In the near future, we can expect further developments in this area with the introduction of 3G technology and 3G mobile phones in the Indian market.

Internet can be used for English language learning in many ways. Using On-line courses, online available learning materials, Virtual reality Learning, Blogs, Podcast, video sharing, social networking sites etc. are prominent ways to promote and enhance English Language Learning. Virtual Reality is another dimension in CALL, where learners can take different avatars to explore, create, and interact through chat and increasingly voice with one another. Second Life is one such virtual world, which is accessible via the Internet. In SL, the users are called Residents and they interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore, relate, socialize, create and trade virtual property, and travel in the virtual world. As 3D virtual worlds become more complex in the future, they will offer different opportunities for language education. Some communities for language educators in Second Life include the following:

English Village is a community of language teachers in Asia. Second Life English Community is an open community for language learners and teachers. SL Experiments is a community of language teachers using Second Life.

Blog is another conceptual version of expression in the open source format. A blog is a kind of a website maintained by an individual with commentary on the topic of one's choice (social, political, personal, etc.) Blogs are primarily textual. Audio/Voice blogging and Video blogging are also becoming popular. Voice blogging is posting recorded audio files in the blog site. A blog can be used as an effective CALL application.

Pod casting is another tool that can be used for language teaching. Broadcasting of audio or video content in the Internet is termed as pod casting. Pod casts can be either live or recorded. The BBC website has a separate section for pod casts under the topic 6 Minute English. Each pod cast is six minutes long and it contains examples and explanations to help you improve your knowledge of the English language across a wide range of topics.

Video publication through sites like You Tube, Daily motion, Flickr, Google Video, Metacafe, etc. Has created a revolutionary change in the way Internet is perceived. You Tube and BBC international commercial television channel have collaborated to form an online channel for enabling English language learning/teaching. According to a British Council research, 69% of learners around the world learnt most effectively when socializing informally. Face book, a popular social networking site has more than 60 million active users. This site had an average of 250,000 new registrations per day since January 2007. Another social networking site MySpace has 85% of its users below 18 years of age. In addition to Face book and MySpace, sites like Reunion, Bebo and Twitter have attracted millions of Internet users worldwide. With the help of social networking sites Language learning can be promoted. For the English language learning, in a traditional classroom, the teacher speaks and uses a blackboard to express oneself. The landscape of a modern classroom is different in more ways than one. A modern classroom is a Smart Classroom, which would have video and data projectors, sound systems, video conferencing facilities, Wi-Fi connectivity, television, DVD players, video document cameras, etc. Learning through ICT gives way to revise or reproduce the material with no or less cost and which is not, always the case in other media. The ability of this media to be used as flexible self-

study resource may be useful in accommodating these learner differences. Learners can focus on the area they are interested or weak and can learn at their own pace. They can take as much time as they like, they can repeat the same module number of times they prefer. Advantages of ICT tools are as follows:

- Technology can enable the learner to feel that they have control of their own learning: it can allow learners to shape their learning by encouraging the perception that a culture's varied media is a collection of resources which the learner can be guided through, and that they have choices about the route which they take.
 - Network-based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence.
 - Shy or inhibited learners can be greatly benefited by individualized, learner-centered collaborative learning. High fliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace.
- Always available a hypermedia dictionary to find word meanings and enrich vocabulary.
 - Provides interaction, communicative activities and real audience
 - Supplies comprehensible input
 - Supports development of cognitive abilities
 - Utilizes task-based and problem-solving activities
 - Is Learner-centered and promote learners autonomy
 - Facilitates focused development of English language skills
 - Meets affective needs of learners
 - Provides appropriate feedback and assessment

The global village has inflated the demand for proficiency in English. On/Off campus interviews, job fairs, Career Melas have entered the learners' itinerary today. Irrespective of the proficiency level and background, the earners have to hone their LSRW skills in English to bag a place in the arena of placements. Selection procedure like Group Discussions and video conferencing are hurdles to students who are not very proficient in the language and are socially disadvantaged. So English language learning can no longer take place in an effective manner within a traditional way. The impact and influence of Information Technology on society and education have made Computer Assisted language teaching a necessity. With the help of ICT- based tools and constantly growing number of available educational resources, language learners are able to learn individually and in personalized way also. The use of several media-audio, video, authentic contexts and real world experiences help language learners with different learning styles to assimilate the content according to their needs.

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