

The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Facilitating Speech and Language Skills in English

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Abstract

The application of ICT tools in teaching and learning has become a buzzing trend in the educational field in the 2nd decade of this 21st century. Catering to the needs of learners, the infusion of digital tools in modern classrooms has provided a significant stimulus for enhancing learners' skills in the areas in which they are concerned.

Keywords- Role of Information, Communication Technology, Facilitating Speech, Language Skills in English

Introduction

Despite digital divisions in many parts of the world, the charisma of E-Learning shows its imperative presence in almost every field because it allows easy access to course materials, ensures flexible space, and provides enough time and pace of study. Shivaji Chatterjee, in his article in Financial Express, rightly observes:

The rapid increase in internet connectivity has been an important catalyst for the growth of e-learning. A robust internet ecosystem, with a multitude of local and global players, will help online learning make further inroads. The story is not limited to schools alone. Indian companies are adopting e-learning platforms as continuous employee learning has become a strategic necessity.

Teaching and learning of language and literature have remained relevant because various ICT tools and digital technologies are being employed to enhance and improve their understanding and simultaneously develop new customs and diverse ways of learning. As a "normalized" practice, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has become a vital component in pedagogy for the extension of English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). With digital advancement, teachers and technology are integrated to facilitate blended learning in the "extended classrooms" for those learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

Information and communication technology, while providing the teachers with means to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching, is not just playing a peripheral role in the field of ELT but instead holding the central position. E-learning is a powerful means of changing and reforming the conventional form of English learning. Distance-learning language courses are one example where geographical barriers can easily be overpowered through e-learning modules. This paper explores how the increased emphasis on digital technology has influenced modern-day language education by facilitating and extending speech and language skills. Simultaneously, it analyses the concept of blended learning with a particular reference to the transformations in ELT & ESP through diverse ICT

tools and E-learning for providing better access to the language in engaging, interactive, practical, meaningful, and stimulating ways.

The Use of ITC and Digital Labs in Learning Language and Speech Skills

In today's classrooms, ICT provides a productive means to access the core curriculum. It supports the understanding of language and speech through visual support and facilitates the learners to appropriately study at their own pace. By supporting speech, language, or communication, this technology makes the explicit teaching of language skills possible, making learners gain confidence and competency. It involves using visual support (picture or symbol support programs) to enable the learners to understand and develop vocabulary knowledge via digital vocabulary packages and concept mapping software. It also assists in developing writing skills with the ability to listen back, adapt, and self-correct the work produced. With the help of specific text-to-speech software and reading & writing tools, the word-processing skills of learners can be enhanced. Voice output communication aids are the new implementation for providing means to communicate with others for pupils suffering from speech impairment.

They are outfitted with ICT tools, and digital language labs are frequently used to sharpen language and speech skills. These labs are generally equipped with computers, internet, audio-visual aids, and specialized programs & software to facilitate the practice of language skills. Changing the nature of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning, these language laboratories are often known by many other names such as digital language labs, multimedia language labs, language media centres, multimedia learning centres, etc. With the advancement of information technology, today's digital labs use software-only language lab solutions and digital media in a revolutionizing way. Modern digital language labs allow teachers to supervise, manage, deliver, display, evaluate, and gather audio-visual and web-based multimedia content. With the new wave of technology, the nature of:

EFL courses have changed. Students mostly required to do project work, collaborative assignment and to interact with the outside world beyond the classrooms. The traditional language laboratories may thus be no longer needed. A teacher who can use digital pedagogical technology effectively, students who have a sense of empowerment for having learned the new technology, and recognize the importance of acquiring these skills in the digital age and excellent technology are key factors for the future EFL classes (Khampusaen 8.6).

Modern-day language labs use content that guarantees far more affluent activity-based learning. These network-based contents are self-authored or free to be accessed from anywhere. This consists of various materials like audio, video, podcasts, blogs, wikis, flash-based games, internet learning sources, etc. With time, the concept of fixed network is vanishing and slowly being replaced by the new digital "cloud" labs. Cloud allows students and teachers to access the required information on their digital devices, regardless of time and place. Many language labs can now be accessed from anywhere through the World Wide Web or language apps. Learners can subscribe to these labs online and learn at their own pace. Some popular online language labs like [Smigin](#), [Living Language Lab](#), [Mango Languages](#), [FluentU](#), MosaLingua, etc., can be accessed from anywhere for the learners' convenience.

Such Digital laboratories offer **well-rounded practice for the comprehensive development of language skills** - [speaking](#), [listening](#), [reading](#) and [writing](#). Furthermore, these labs are **exceptionally interactive** for sharpening communication skills through realistic simulated conversations. They break sentences into parts and then assemble them to help illustrate how the words impart meaning to the sentences when blended. This technique also assists the learner in forming their sentences rather than focusing on memorized words and phrases as they do in conventional learning. They clarify the sentences and phrases with associated videos, images and flashcards. Learners naturally absorb the grammar and vocabulary of the target language through simple acts of interaction. All these exercises enhance learners' essential skills that can successfully be used in real life. Learners actively participating in interactive activities are more exposed to naturalistic learning than conventional textbook learning.

Through voice recording, the learner can perfect their pronunciation by comparing their speech with that of a native speaker. With innovative practices, authentic content, and real-world videos, digital language labs are **more engaging** and engrossing than conventional learning. Inventive methods and in-context learning activities keep the learners interested and engaged, as the lessons usually end with a game or activity. They provide additional resources like podcasts, blogs, and wikis to enhance learning. Language libraries and online tools facilitate the better navigation of related online content.

E-learning in the Field of English language

With the blend of technology and learning, the e-learning trend in language and literature is also catching up in India. E-learning of the English language involves intentionally using networked information and communications technology for learning. It is a fast and dynamic application of electronic systems for enhancing linguistic and phonetic skills. Mediums such as the internet, computers, interactive whiteboards, multimedia CDs, DVDs, e-books, online games, online magazines, and virtual chat rooms are employed in it, and it aims to reduce time and expenditure. The e-learning market in India is estimated to be around \$3 billion. However, it is still growing sporadically in foreign language learning as it has its main base in urban areas.

The mastering of language through learner-centred e-learning is becoming attractive day by day not only because language learning is no longer tethered to a classroom and timetables but also because software programs can "seamlessly integrate social media, making it possible to create online communities that are course-specific" ("E-learning"). There are multiple benefits of e-learning for ESP learners. It is a learner-centred process with the specific features of cooperative learning and self-monitoring. The learner's role is primary, and the teacher is just a facilitator or guide. It adds up to the learner's flexibility, ability, and convenience, as he can have remote access to the learning regardless of time and place. Allowing the learners to be effortlessly exposed to the target language and culture reinforces their communicative competencies and enhances and strengthens their linguistic skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. It promotes the concept of a self-paced learning hub where students can become skilled at their chosen rate. It also facilitates a healthy interaction among learners and experts. It fosters comprehensive learning with the help of web-based instructional sources and tools such as virtual classes with learners worldwide and proper simulations for their motivation.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) for Enhancing English Language Skills

E-learning of the English language has specific sub-categories, such as learning through World Wide Web-based English learning and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Network-based language learning (NBLL), free online courses like MOOC, etc. Before the rise of the internet, learners used electronic mail for language learning and teaching (LL/LT). Take, for example, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), which is undoubtedly a "phenomenon" that has revolutionised the practice of distance learning worldwide. MOOCs are online courses that aim for flexible learning and open access to prestigious institutions through the World Wide Web. These courses are based on the concept of blended widening access to learning. MOOCs promote interactive learning via technology for students and teachers. As a revolution in distance learning, MOOCs were primarily introduced in 2006 and surfaced as a well-liked mode of learning in 2012.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) ... are identified as a potential game changer for education, with the possibility of opening up education and offering a wide variety of choice. The concept of the MOOC resonates with the rise of true mass education, with a wide variety of learning needs and scenarios. There are still a number of challenges for these and it is early days in terms of their development and impact. The current offerings of free content, with some form of supported provision, have enabled many tens of thousands to explore and experiment with learning in new ways (Gordon 17).

Certain short-term online MOOC courses in English are becoming a buzzing trend among learners. Massive Open Online English Courses (MOOEC) and Massive Online Open Language Courses (MOOLCs) are among such specific short-term MOOC courses where prestigious universities and colleges provide a collection of free online English lessons.

Embracing open education such as MOOCs and Open Educational Resources has brought also a turning point in the field of Language Learning. Language competences and intercultural skills are more than ever before key qualifications for every citizen nowadays in every part of the world. Massive Online Open Language Courses (MOOLCs) can strongly support this educational need as they can give the opportunity to massive number of learners to learn for free a language through communication in a learning environment with no space and time limitations (Perifanou 10).

All activities such as enrolment, assignments, supervision, and lectures are done through the World Wide Web in these courses. Computer-Aided Assessment (CAA) is progressively more significant in English language teaching and learning. This medium checks and assesses learners' understanding after taking some classes. These courses help learners and teachers to improve and evaluate their English language ability globally. They assist in preparing for higher education study in English and communicating in English more effectively. Learning English via online MOOC courses challenges conventional forms of learning. In these courses, the virtual English environment provided by the World Wide Web makes the learning autonomous with creative and practical ideas. It enhances

the oral proficiencies of students as they become free from traditional books and instructors – using the Internet media.

Prestigious institutions and universities worldwide offer such certificates and diploma courses, where online lectures, expert opinions, learning packages, and e-materials greatly help widen learners' spectrum of language skills. Along with the traditional language textbooks, online blogs, posts, comments, podcasts, webcasts, online chatting, discussion boards, and virtual study jams ensure that language learning becomes easy, engaging, and entertaining. Online courses like MOOCs can also help already employed learners reskill themselves and stay competitive without taking a break from their jobs. Indian institutions are also collaborating with institutions in other countries like the US to facilitate the e-learning of foreign languages through such online courses. The British Council has also launched a series of free, Massive, Open Online Courses for teachers and learners via the Future Learn platform. These courses are **Understanding IELTS: Techniques for English Language Tests** and **Exploring English: Language and Culture**. The **Understanding IELTS: Techniques for English Language Tests** course is advantageous for aspirants of higher education in foreign lands. The program takes the language learners through each stage of the language test — reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The **Exploring English: Language and Culture** course facilitates the learners' exploration of language usage, English cultural scenarios, and techniques for improving their English language skills. The curriculum does not follow a traditional language syllabus but takes authentic English in context as a starting point.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and English Language Skills

In the last few years, there has been an emergent corpus of research studies on how computers can best smooth the progress of language teaching and learning. In the Indian scenario, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a comparatively fresh and fast-evolving academic field that facilitates the role of ITC in enhancing language and speech skills in a naturalistic way.

It includes a wide range of activities and initiatives in materials development, pedagogical practice and research. Today, CALL provides extremely interactive and communicative support for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, including extensive use of the internet. By integrating technology into English language pedagogy, a large number of CALL applications have been designed and developed for the specific purpose of enhancing the English language skills of students (Mohanty 3).

In the fully automated Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), a learner or trainee sits at a computer following a language course:

Step-by-step, the computer presents the essential vocabulary and structures. These are accompanied, where appropriate, by still and animated graphic images, photographs and video recordings. As new words and phrases are introduced, authentic male and female voices pronounce them, and the learner repeats them. The learner's voice is recorded by the computer and played back. Any errors in pronunciation are indicated graphically on the screen. Offending syllables are highlighted and additional practice is offered on sounds which the learner finds difficult. At the end of each presentation sequence, the computer tests the learner's grasp of the new vocabulary and structures,

marking and recording those words and phrases which have been imperfectly recalled and offering feedback on points of grammar that the learner appears to have misunderstood. The learner has access at all times to an online dictionary, a reference grammar and verb conjugation tables (Davies 113).

Here, the technology is employed to develop listening and attention skills (listening to stories, following instructions, etc.) among the language learners. It also serves to recall what has happened through additional visual evidence, like photographs, to support auditory skills. Learners with inadequate English language aptitude can profit from information technology in various ways. Using multimedia software and production tools provides them with a better-off linguistic environment that accommodates their requirements through animations, audio-visuals, and graphical designs to express tricky concepts, as well as clear audio to model correct pronunciation and to repeat sounds and words. The effective integration of technology with language learning also helps learners to be at ease with modern computer-based learning.

Thus, ICT, through automating the learning process, offers a wealth of learning opportunities for students learning language skills, and the discrete use of computers in the classroom undoubtedly enhances learners' performance. The CALL will become a healthy medium for providing skilled human resources amongst the quality and quantity challenges for foreign language teaching in Indian scenarios at the primary, secondary, or higher levels. Enhancing the quality of teaching and enabling a suitable learning environment can be advantageous for students who generally need access to quality institutions for language learning.

So, chalk-and-talk methods of teaching & learning are slowly being replaced by various digital gadgets and technology. ICT is of enormous utilization in teaching and learning the English language as it provides instructors and learners with lots of creative and practical ideas to create a learner-friendly environment in the classroom. It facilitates highly motivational and computer-based activities for learners that serve as a stimulant to innovative learning. With easy and effective access to information, it provides more opportunities for interaction between learners and instructors. Here the Teacher, with the use of technology, becomes a better facilitator cum guide, and students take responsibility for learning on their own through PPTs, interactive whiteboards, sounds, graphics, images, animations, news clips, e-books, movies, clouds, blogs, wikis, DVDs, interactive multimedia elements in interactive virtual labs. With the positive application of information technology, English Language Learners (ELLs) achieve an affirmative enhancement in their language and speech skills and the impetus for autonomy, self-determination, and self-belief. The learner-centred approach ensures more significant opportunities and possibilities for learners who can articulate themselves to the world outside, subsequently increasing their communicative prowess.

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