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TECHNO-PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

By

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ABSTRACT

The effervescent progress of technologies in the modern era demands new pedagogical techniques in the process of effective and successful teaching and learning. The prospective teachers who are competent with technical skills and have command over language alone can produce articulate students. Prospective teachers, when they enter the real classroom, are supposed to mould any type of clay into an anticipated form. Therefore, they must be trained by the teacher-educators in such a way that they, in future, should be able to cultivate pupils' inquisitiveness in learning through all senses in order to improve the level of language skills. The advent of multimedia outdates the traditional teaching method but its adoption is done at a snail's pace. Undoubtedly, multimedia technology plays an effective role in the process of teaching and learning language skills. Multimedia tools act as cognitive enhancers. They augment the learning experience of the prospective teachers and enable them to concentrate on the development of more sophisticated cognitive skills. The powerful cognitive ability of a learner reflects his or her profundity in language skills and effective communication. It is possible that they can hone their language skills greatly and effectively through techno-pedagogic practices. But the second language learners' language skills are seen to be left less developed in the absence of multimedia tools. Hence, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to strive hard with all their verve and vitality to make accessible to these learners the latest techno-pedagogic strategies to remove all the road blocks to their acquisition of the level of competence expected of them.

Keywords: Prospective Teachers, English Language Skills, Techno-Pedagogy, Multimedia Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are supposed to represent the most enlightened part of a nation. It is truism to say that the character of a nation is moulded in classrooms. No nation can march ahead on the road to progress if it is devoid of competent and committed teachers. A classroom is like the womb of a mother. Teachers, who shape the young minds into various forms through the process of education, are like mothers. The teachers, who are equipped with technical skills and have command over language, can produce well nurtured and nourished students who may excel in communicative skills and exhibit expected levels of competence in their performance. The tomorrow's successful country will be born from today's well equipped and technologically advanced classrooms. English language plays a significant role in spreading innovative techno-based teaching and learning strategies across the world. It is inevitable that pupils, especially those who study in an Indian ambience, have to expand their knowledge through English which is the global lingua-franca. In this context, every teacher educator is the most significant architect of the prospective teachers as he / she fortifies and sharpens their English language skills through innovative techno-pedagogic practices. Hence, their pupils when they assume their roles as educators may bring about a congenial environment which facilitates the development of effective communicative skills in each of their learners under their tutelage.

Education is a life long process. In its broad sense, education is normally thought to be acquiring knowledge and developing skills and understanding- cognitive capabilities. People are identified by their capacity to learn, communicate and reason Bartlett & Burton (2007:12,13). But the status quo of the second language

learners' communicative skills are not adequately developed these days and their ability to communicate in English is considerably affected by their mother tongue interference.

Moreover, they have neither adequate training classes nor any linguistic assessment mechanism to test their skills. If this situation prevailing now, is allowed to continue in teacher training institutions, there is bound to be further fall in standard of English where these learners are concerned. To offset this linguistic block multimedia tools need to be used and conventional teaching methods need to be modified.

Need to be Techno-savvy

To become a full-fledged teacher it is requisite that the prospective teachers must involve and reinforce themselves in learning the language skills through the use of technology as classrooms are no longer limited to the text in a book or the confines of a particular school. Technology allows students to be actively involved in the process of constructing their own knowledge, facilitating the development of a "learner-centred" classroom. It can improve learning and instruction, support the development of a rich learning environment, and enhance assessment. By adopting the right kind of learning environment and instruction, technology can promote students' inquiry and discovery, decrease geographic limitations and provide opportunities to develop workplace skills. Teachers can use technology to engage the learner, support instructional strategies, deliver instruction, enhance their teaching strengths and improve on their weaknesses Recesso & Orrill(2008:4,6). Another major issue is that large number of teacher educators and prospective teachers lack computer knowledge and so their lecture is handicapped without computer tools. It is very essential that teacher and the taught must be familiar with the workings of a variety of hardware tools and must understand the uses of several types of software, Ryan, et. al (2008:184). They should realize that computed-mediated instruction modules can be self-paced, graduated to teach from basic to highly advanced levels and designed in a wide range of formats that accommodate diverse learning styles Goodman (2001:133). A successful teacher has a repertoire of teaching techniques and strategies and a broad knowledge of teaching tools and materials gained through training and experience. An important facet of teaching skill is the ability to relate techniques and materials to specific objectives Burton et. al. (1975:5). Hence, there is an imperative need to spread among teachers the awareness of the effective role played by multimedia.

Multimedia Technology

The most important instrument of 21st century is nothing but the fast growing multimedia technology which has penetrated into every field with its tremendous and challenging applications particularly in the realm of education. Multimedia is an integration of multiple media elements into one synergetic and symbiotic whole that results in more benefits for the end user than any one of the media element can provide individually as it enables learning through exploration and experience. With multimedia, the process of learning can become more target oriented, more partaking, supple in time and space, unaffected by distances and tailored to individual learning styles, and make better association between the teacher and the taught to yield better proficiency in English.

Multimedia technology has the potential to accelerate change and development in language education (Sivapalan, 2010). It cannot be denied that the role of innovative technology has been increasing in different forms such as cellular telephones, hand-held computers and digital videodisks and these tools have become incorporated into communication in the ordinary business of life. They are the vital sources of society's vocabulary. Information available in far greater quantities than ever before and the means to access and share it with others is unprecedented (Wighting, 2006). In such circumstances, the acceptance of the emerging technologies cannot be simply brushed aside as it shows the importance of the teacher educators' vital role to be a facilitator to their student-teachers.

Teacher Educators' Attitude towards Multimedia

Multimedia has become a favourable platform for English teacher-educators to play their part very effectively in the classroom. But so far, no painstaking effort is witnessed on their part in enhancing the language skills of prospective teachers through innovative techno-pedagogic practices.

The teacher-educators have known much about the effectiveness of multimedia technology in the language teaching and learning process but they fail to translate them into practice and so, their prospective teachers too become inefficient to make use of these great techno-pedagogical strategies effectively in their teaching and this will ultimately constrict the learning output of pupils in the future. Perhaps, they may feel the integration and application of instructional technologies in higher education may be a complex issue having a few barriers such as funding, teaching competency, limited resources, linguistically trained teachers and time needed to learn, lack of mentoring and support from administrators (Annaraja, 2009). But the barriers that restrain technology integrations into a learning process should not be permissible as it diminishes the quality of the prospective teachers' language learning, especially the language skills which can be developed in them effectively only through innovative multimedia applications. Kumarasamy [2002] reiterates that the teacher educators should recognize the new skills and train prospective teachers to develop and welcome a partnership with electronic education.

A study (Rafeedali, 2009) on 'Computer based technology and its pedagogical utility' states that most of the higher secondary school teachers are not using computer resources in their teaching-learning process and they do not apply information technology resources in the classroom interaction for the evaluation. But it is the time for teachers to realize that from payroll accounting to enlistment scrutinizing, from educational diagnostics to computerized instruction, from the production of daily lesson plans to typing instruction, and from finding information to hooking up to the internet, computers have affected educational institutions in significant ways (Gentry & et. al. 2005). The effective use of these technologies alone can change the way teachers teach and the way learners perceive information.

The Status of Prospective Teachers

Prospective teachers can reach higher levels of cognition when they apply personal learning styles instilled with innovative techniques to achieve their goals. Cowan (2008) witnesses that students with varying learning styles

become engaged with educational technology and find success that had eluded them when using other teaching tools and strategies. But, due to the lack of cognitive abilities, prospective teachers have immense insufficiency of language skills. There are a few factors for this deficiency which the authors would like to bring to the limelight are as follows:

- Most of the prospective teachers are the first generation learners. Their parents are either illiterate or won't converse English at home.

- They lack possibilities to interact with their fellow mates in second language as L1 governs the entire classroom.

- They find no opportunities in their daily routine for practising LSRW skills.

- They don't have multimedia based text books or work books for cultivating their language skills.

- Most of the teachers or teacher-educators do not know to use multimedia applications for teaching a concept or content of their subjects.

- Conventional method of teaching is highlighted rather than technology-based teaching.

It is also vital that teacher-educators, keeping the status of their learners, should use appropriate multimedia tools for further learning activities, developing new methods in facilitating learning and evaluating their performance. They should develop their spectacular flair for communicative skills and carve them to be the first-rate language teachers. Teacher-educators can also design multimedia package by taking the role of an instructional designer by setting instructional objectives, analyzing the content and the learner and then arranging the learning experiences according to the needs and interests of the learner (Susan, 2008).

Cognitive Ability and Language

Cognitive ability, which refers to the mental processes, makes it possible for human being to acquire, store, arrange and rearrange information. As human beings interact with the environment, the old concepts are constantly modified, and new ones created. Language provides labels for these concepts and furnishes human

beings with a means for communicating what they know (Hess & Croft 1972). Language is the best and most important instrument for social interaction and transmitting information from generation to generation.

Powerful cognitive ability of a teacher reflects his or her profundity in language skills and effective communication. The central and state governments of India have spent crores of rupees on teaching English language. It is highly deplorable that large number of students of educational institutions come out crowning with degrees with excellent performance in their examination, but they fail frequently in their oral expression either at the time of social interactions, interview, debate, homily discussion or written, due to the paucity of their language skills. With the help of multimedia software tool they can concentrate on the development of sophisticated cognitive skills. It goes without saying that computer tools act as "cognitive enhancers" to broaden the capabilities of the students (Dede, 1987).

Accumulation of vocabulary is the prerequisite for Language fluency and proficiency. It can be developed through three major language use domains, namely a) conversational domain which includes interactive uses, b) uses of literacy comprises reading and writing, and c) meta-linguistic tasks that include activities which call forth analyzed knowledge and cognitive control (e.g., grammar exercises). Each domain requires certain skills for developing language proficiency. Therefore the skills of all domains should be merged for bringing out effective communicative skills. Proficiency in each domain requires certain skills and the skills of all the domains put together are called language skills.

Techno-pedagogical devices as language enhancers

The language taught through techno-pedagogical devices would enable the learners to acquire proficiency in productive and receptive skills. The purpose of teaching English is to ameliorate the communicative ability which involves knowledge of the linguistic structures, skills and strategies for using language forms in various social situations. The traditional method of teaching is not ample to pave a sturdy way for acquiring cognitive abilities because traditional exercises require learners to work through a series of unrelated sentences, changing them in

some way according to the grammatical rule that they have recently 'learnt'. This procedure is found effective on all accounts, as it emphasizes usage rather than use, accuracy rather than fluency, form rather than function. While a certain amount of this manipulation practice is needed for habit formation, it can never be sufficient. It is only with communication practice that there can be any hope for transferring one's ideas, feelings and information to another (Sahni, 2002). Hence teacher-educators should be conscious of using the animation software such as MS-Power point, Macromedia Flash, 3D Studio Max, Maya to train up and enable the prospective teachers to teach any complex linguistic concept in their classrooms in future. The development of innovative technologies provides new possibilities to teaching profession, but at the same time the use of such technology requires more demands on teachers to learn how to apply them in their teaching process (Robinson & Latchem, 2003).

Prospective teachers should also be aware of the availability of multimedia resources such as interactive Encyclopedias, Micro Soft Encarta, Digital Multimedia format books in CD-Rom format. Multimedia is a potential pedagogical tool which enhances listening skill. In fact, it is more accessible to the teachers and the learners of English language. Brett enlists the possible advantages of multimedia applications in assisting the development of listening skills, by using moving video (Brett, 1995). Computer-Mediated Communication, one of the subdivisions of Computer Assisted Language Learning, focuses on how students can use the internet to enhance their speaking, listening, and pronunciation skills in a foreign language. The utilization of internet has grown exponentially in the post modern society. Therefore the students can access website containing stored audio or video files or that transmitting live broadcasts in order to practise listening skill (George, 2005).

The experience of the researchers and the feedback from students through interviews revealed that interactive multimedia materials integrate language skills. The Web offers students access to radio and television programmes, news reports, songs, speeches, interviews, biographies advertisements, and, movie trailers as well as reading of

stories, essays and poetries for listening practice. Language teachers can use these web-based audio and video resources to develop their own listening exercises. They can listen to compare the coverage of a top news story as reported both CNN and BBC to provoke extensive discussions on the respective topics (George, 2005).

Liquid Cristal Display (LCD) projector was limited in use as it was expensive. But the power of the projector has been developed from simple presentation device to the heartbeat of interactive whiteboards for bringing the content to life for all learners. Thus technology integration is not only changing the way we think but also the way we teach (McCoog, 2007). The teacher should be aware of how gradually technological encroachment takes place in classrooms through innovative pedagogical tools like Multimedia Flashcards which aim at vocabulary development. Moreover Digital Story Telling is a simple method of using widely available image editing software to blend together digitized still photographs and narrative to create short evocative and informative multimedia pieces. It offers a unique learning experience for students (Fletcher & Cambre, 1987).

Remedial Measures to Acquire Language Skills

'Learning by doing and seeing is better than hearing' providing students more and more sensory experiences. Experience and research have shown that students are able to remember 20 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they see, 50 percent of what they see and hear, 80 percent of what they say, and 90 percent of what they say and do. Multimedia tools are necessary to generate considerable amount of interest that favours impressive and effective learning climate. So the teacher educators, especially, the second language teachers must follow techno-pedagogic strategies and incorporate multimedia tools in their everyday lectures so as to develop the language skills of the prospective teachers. Language skills can be acquired greatly accomplishing the activities by the prospective teachers through Multimedia pedagogical tools. The teacher educators should prepare the tools for each and every activity to enhance their language skills. The authors suggest a few remedial measures to enhance their language skills.

To ameliorate the listening skill

The prospective teachers should be given opportunities to develop this skill by listening to English movie clips and various conversations at different situations, news reading, lectures, interviews, announcements, advertisements, commentaries and instructions which would enable them to understand pause, pitch, intonation, stress and syllable division. The following can be useful to achieve listening skill:

- Cultivating the habit of listening to BBC news bulletin and comprehend the correct pronunciation every day.

- Listening to an expert's lecture on TV or DVD player and making a note of it.

- Listening for facts, specific information and making inferences.

- Listening to talks and descriptions.

- Listening to the talks given both by a British speaker and an American speaker and distinguish the difference between their languages.

To develop speaking skill

The prospective teachers must learn to use phonetic symbols to identify diphthongs and consonant sounds and distinguish short and long vowels. The teacher educators may facilitate them to practice utterances at social situations like making polite requests, expressing gratitudes, talking about likes and dislikes, greeting and introducing oneself, giving a condolence speech and a address of welcome, introducing a guest of honour, offering felicitations and farewell speech and proposing a vote of thanks.

To ameliorate the speaking skill the prospective teachers can also do the following:

- Learning to initiating, sustaining and closing a conversation

- Learning to take turns or interrupt in a conversation

- Learning how to seek clarification, make an apology and offer an opinion.

- Learning to describe people, places, events and things and to express agreement or disagreement

- Learning to make or cancel appointments and reschedule appointments

- Learning to remind somebody of something explicitly and implicitly

- Learning how to complain politely using a neutral tone

- Learning telephone etiquette

To develop reading skill

The prospective teachers are expected to practise reading short stories, articles, essays or poems to understand diction, formal and informal style, slang, and other techniques employed by the authors. The teacher educators must enable them to practice reading English newspapers using skimming and scanning methods to widen their eye-span which helps to fix their eyes on a set of words without moving the eyes. Cultivating reading habit paves the way to enrich vocabulary and appreciate the figures of speech.

As Edgier & Rao (2004:22) suggest the prospective teachers may select to read a library book whereby the recorded voice is contained in a cassette directly related to the printed words. As the cassette plays the sequential words, they may follow along in his /her own chosen book. The pupil is gaining an increasing number of sight of words for reading in this activity, as well as increasing skill in reading.

To ameliorate the reading skill the prospective teachers can also do the following:

- Practise learning to fix a sense group of words while reading a sentence.

- Practise scanning a particular number in a telephone directory.

- practise skimming an advertisement for obtaining details or skim a website for getting information.

To develop writing skill

It is very vital that every prospective teacher must learn the mechanics of writing to develop legibility and intelligibility Secondly, they should enhance intellectual writing by learning to write formal and informal letters, precis writing, story writing, note making, note taking etc. And thirdly, they should know to fulfil the needs of different life situations and

so they must practice filling up forms or applications related to bank, post-office, railways, airways and educational institutions. To ameliorate the writing skill the prospective teachers can also do the following:

- Practice cursive writing

- Browse the internet for learning different types of formal and informal letters and their formats

- Learning to fill up different kinds of forms and application collected from various organizations, offices, institutions and public transportations

- Learning to develop the topic sentence into a paragraph.

- Learning to write a telegraphic message

- Learning to use the punctuations

- Learn to write using Microsoft Word Processor

Conclusion

Language skills play a vital role in enhancing the prospective teachers in all the facets of life. As they are the nation builders, every government has to think of their growth in language. In the B.Ed. course, the Teaching of English is one of the optional papers in which language skills runs a chapter. This chapter enables the prospective teachers how they can teach them to students in the future but it does not assist them in any way to develop their own language skills. How can they teach the students unless they are enriched with those skills? Firstly, the curriculum framed for the B.Ed course has not insisted any single practical examination for testing their level of language skills and so it should be one of the compulsory papers. And secondly, the government should provide ample multimedia materials along with workbooks in order to minimize the expense and follow uniformity.

The educational institutions should produce proficient and effective teachers in language skills. They should appoint teacher educators with high proficiency in English language apart from adequate qualification. They should provide spacious language teaching multimedia laboratory. They should bestow sufficient training to the teacher educators in utilizing the multimedia equipments.

It is the duty and the responsibility of every teacher educator to look after the proficiency of their student

teachers in their language skills. And so they should strive hard to enable them with all their power and vigour in making them achieve the skills. They must either make use of self-made tools or standardized materials to teach them.

In the era of 21st century, technology has penetrated its roots deeply into every field, especially education. The world is being shrunken and now it can be brought to the palm of every human being. It goes without saying that it is a period of rapid technological changes which have great impact on education. So the prospective teachers should become conscious of being enhanced themselves with language skills so that they can come out with flying colours in the teaching field.

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