

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Integrated English Learning - An Epiphany Beyond Reality



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ABSTRACT

Learning is an evolving process. It has its foundations in learners' aptitude, interest and availability of resources. There is history of evolution of tools which have enriched the process of learning at different intervals of time from the printing press to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the present scenario provision of ICT needs to be supplemented with faith in learners' attitude. The undertones should surface now and proclaim that teaching learning cannot be isolated from ICT for the simple reason of making them participatory and inclusive.

Introduction

Epiphany is described as sudden realisation of something of utmost significance. Generally, the term is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realisation allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. The realisation that ICT can alleviate problems of literacy and lead to expansion of knowledge is intense. There is necessity not to count the numbers of computers and tabulate data about ICT related provisions in educational institutions. In order to actualise it, we need to move out of the euphoria of epiphany that is limited just to the presence of ICT in our surroundings.

Theories of learning are evolving with new insights on how we learn and subsequently what we should learn. From the historical perspective the printing press almost revolutionised the way learning was understood. There was lot of printing material available to the learners according to their needs. Textbooks and supplementary materials are part of this process. However, in-depth study would reveal that up to a major part of this century the trend percolated through education has been to create homogeneity in spite of variety of print resources available to the learners. This could probably be the result of industrialisation which has divided the system of production and distribution into segments, believing this would increase the efficiency. This compartmentalisation has

increased the production and productivity but it has done major harm by decreasing the limits of thinking/ cognition to specific compartments. Similar effects can be seen in the area of education. There is isolation of schools from social and cultural settings. Learning is fenced off from the wider and rich experience of the learner in social and cultural reality.

Behaviourist school of learning laid emphasis on symmetrical patterns of learning which can be achieved through a pedagogy which emphasised on learning through imitation, drill and practice. Language laboratory originated from this understanding. Speech and communication became important in language learning. English accent was the priority. All said and done this approach and language laboratory as its ancillary failed to address the issue of creativity in learning language. This aspect was brought to light by liberal linguists who believed that we acquire language outside the school or classroom.

There is evidence that children have a repertoire of language which they have not learnt in schools. This idea broadened our understanding of how languages are learnt. With this emerged the liberal views of giving autonomy to learners and teacher should occupy the role of the facilitator. The critical reflection on the part of the learners is promoted. The tool that came into the hands of learners this time was ICT. There is huge investment in ICT sector globally. Schools have been provided with computer labs with access to internet. Special training programmes are organised for teachers to

make them ICT empowered. In the context of ICT, learners too have ordinary mobile phones and smart phones which can be put to use for learning language.

ICT for Creating Autonomous Learning Environment

We can define ICT in simple words as a set of diverse tools and resources which can be used for the purposes of communication, creating, disseminating, storing and managing multiple sources of information. ICT is an integration of technology as computers, internet, and broadcasting technologies like radio, television and telephone.

The most significant advantage of integrating ICT in teaching learning of English is that it gives freedom and autonomy to the learners to navigate their learning outside the classrooms and without the handholding of their teachers. This has also resulted in a parallel growth of language which is computer enabled and is popular among learners. Learning to use computers provides a strong intrinsic motivation for learning English.

However advent of ICT has innocuously been linked with English. Understanding of English is also an important enabling factor to explore and broaden the horizon of learning. In fact, ICT creates a new and attractive environment. It makes language learning settings more socially interactive. Learners who prefer to remain silent in classrooms become interactive by sharing their resources with peers, teachers and friends. This mutual give and take develops

among learners a purpose of learning which is lost most of the time in face to face classrooms in terms of teacher's authoritative presence and instructions. ICT supported classrooms can successfully break the silence resulting in disinterest of learners. In the Indian context learners in senior classes attach prestige to learning English. The failures are difficult to cope with. Computers and other tools of ICT are medium of overcoming this individual shortcoming of being not proficient in English. Teachers can guide them on the issues by referring to authentic websites, online articles, interviews and news items to read. Academically speaking, learners, if purposefully guided by teachers, can learn to focus on developing skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. They begin to develop for themselves the skill of comprehension once they get exposure to a variety of resources and sense to choose relevant materials for global understanding of issues and concerns.

There has been concern about maintaining standards of English which do not match with existing Indian standards. Use of internet can give exposure to English in an international context. One can access pronunciation, translation, materials on theme, audios, videos and online books. Tools for editing language can improve grammar and punctuation of the writer. Online dictionaries build vocabulary for different situations.

Other tools of ICT like smart phones also provide these facilities. Learners overcome intimidation of English reading and writing

once they have access to ICT. Web 2.0 has created space for the learners to have their blogs and other social networking spaces. These are interactive platforms where learners can exchange their views and consolidate their ideas as well.

Radio and television are also contributing in providing informative platforms to learners. English teaching programmes broadcast by the All India Radio are based on the material prepared by the CIFEL, Hyderabad, and other ELT institutes in India.

Integrating Technology in Language Learning —An Overview

ICT has been a fascinating phenomenon so far. Users have been enamoured as well as facilitated in carrying out their tasks with the tools of ICT though there is obvious lack of skills in understanding and making use of it. The availability of computers is made easier in schools and public places. This has raised the percentage of people who recognises computers as machines of information. The technology boon has also provided access to mobile phones to a very large population who have never been to schools. ICT literacy is progressing irrespective of age, class, caste, religion etc. There is another interesting fact which is emerging about the upscale trend of users of English. People in the remotest areas are becoming familiar with English through television, mobile phones and computers. This is an evidence of the fact that how languages develop faster and meaningfully in social contexts through ICT.

The point that must be highlighted here is to ascertain the reach of ICT in schools and for academic purpose of English language teaching and learning. The well set computer labs in schools may satisfy us in terms of availability of computers and ICT in schools. But another issue which appears to be more urgent is to how these can be made accessible to the learners. The most feasible way is to develop partnership among learners and the teacher in developing ICT skills. Technology is a recent development in this country so teachers and learners could be first time users. Teacher and learners should work together to explore the reaches of ICT.

Partnership is important for number of other reasons:

- A number of appropriate resources can be explored if the teacher and learners are interactive through ICT.
- A space can be created for relevant thoughts and ideas.
- Transparency and accountability can be determined.
- Online tasks are more readable in terms of handwriting, use of punctuation marks and grammatical correctness.
- There is exchange of ideas in a larger group and in the presence of the teacher which further determines the seriousness of task and responsibility of each member of the group to contribute.
- The online tasks have great potential of promoting democratic values among

learners. A patient reader always reflects before he/ she responds. Learners become sensitive to social demeanour which requires tolerance to the ideas of others who they think appear to be different.

- The use of technology is a great social equaliser in terms of overcoming cultural, language, physical, gender and other differences. It broadens our perceptions of this universe and our purpose of being. The exposure to world literature through ICT relieves them of prejudices.
- Power point presentation is a good medium of summarising our thoughts.
- Learners can make use of Microsoft word for their writing tasks which they can save to keep a record.
- Authentic materials can be identified from the website and can be shared with learners on LCD projectors.
- Assignments can be discussed through email which would save time and these can be read as many times as one wants for understanding.

The availability of technology and tools of ICT is there for a long time. However, there is hesitation in extending a friendly hand. Let us be realistic and know that it also means not utilising a huge sum of money that is being spent on developing infrastructure for ICT by the state. The non usage is also a hurdle in expanding the network of ICT. When computer labs are not being used there is no demand for better

and more accessible facilities like Internet, computer teachers, trainers etc. The records should not account for number of computers in the school but also for number of users per day. Otherwise the computer labs will have the same fate as of school libraries and science laboratories.

Creating ICT Environment in School - A Look Within

Teacher Preparation

One important issue is that teachers in the present system are not provided with pedagogical training in the use of ICT rather a simple training on the use of computers is provided which does not serve the purpose of integrating ICT with teaching learning processes. School administrators can look into the avenues which would motivate and empower teachers for making use of ICT.

- Training modules in short content specific courses can be developed.
- Short term computer courses can be designed for the teachers which can be handled independently by them in school computer rooms at their convenience.
- Technical assistance should be available to them.
- Infrastructure for ICT use should be ensured, it includes broadband accessibility as well.
- Massive On line Courses (MOOCS) is another option which provides inputs to teachers based on their needs.
- School administrators can create

computer enabled environment where teachers are encouraged to correspond, and communicate through emails and other means of social media.

The prime concern is familiarising teachers with technology and making it accessible to them. Hands on experiences can give them the confidence of handling it.

Teachers and learners can be introspective and ask themselves following basic questions;

- Are there adequate infrastructure facilities in school to support ICT integrated learning?
- How often are these facilities used?
- Do I possess sufficient skills to carry ICT integrated activities?
- What obstacles do I face while using technology?
- Is the school administration supportive of our endeavours?

Learners of this century have great attraction for technology and desire to master it. Schools can work meaningfully to give them time and space to use computers and mobile phones. There should be guidance and checks to ensure proper utilisation of technology.

It is observed that computer programmes initiated by schools have not been successful for one important reason that there is no integration of technology in their class room learning. The programmes focus on knowing about computers which is

another specialised area and that should be taken up later on. What is more important is the functional aspect of the computer which facilitates the process of learning. This can be experimented in the case of English; using computers and other tools of ICT improves all skills of English language-LSRW.

Teachers have to fight the fear that it will replace the traditional ways of teaching learning like printed textbooks and notebooks etc; ICT is a tool which accessorises knowledge, information, and ensures precision, fluency and accuracy in language learning and related tasks. It has also widened the parameters of assessment. The ICT tools can enable teachers to conduct online tests and assignments even beyond the textbook; this will also save time and allow learners to complete the tasks at their convenience. Teachers can maintain the record of formative assessment on computers. In terms of the boundaries of knowledge and information so far as English language and literature is concerned its reach is infinite as compared to textbooks and classroom teaching. The basic idea is to integrate textbook with ICT as a tool for building new understandings.

A word of Caution...

It would be appropriate here to mention a

word of caution too. It is important to follow the ethics of using materials which are available on the Internet. There are norms which must be followed for copyright materials. The permission from the writer should be sought to use materials for mass use or for publications. Similarly, for the social media the users should be careful in expressing their opinions.

There is huge storehouse of materials available on English language learning. Teachers and learners should select it judiciously and with an understanding of what is needed and appropriate. If we are really serious about realising the vision of education which rests on bridging the chasm of disparity, inequality and replacing them with voices of justice, and celebrating diversity, then we need to take a step towards empowering school curriculum of English language learning with ICT.

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