

## TECHNOLOGY AS A FACILITATOR IN LEARNING OF A LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

This is a “technology-based era” where technological innovations are the order of the day. The role of language teachers/learners in the language learning process has been largely redefined thanks to the rapid technological advancements. As facilitators, the teachers “facilitate” the language acquisition of the learners and help them to equip themselves with effective language skills. The rapid technological strides have necessitated the teachers to be tech-savvy and integrate technology with the teaching and learning of a language. Technology assisted language teaching makes language learning a wholesome and enriching experience. With technology being the buzzword of the day, it has become imperative to enhance the teaching learning methods so as to make language learning “effective, appealing and interesting.” Technology, as a “tool”, provides the learners with updated learning material for language acquisition.

**KEYWORDS:** Facilitator in Learning of a Language

### INTRODUCTION

#### Technology- A Boon for Language Learning

It is needless to say that technology opens up new vistas for language learning. It provides a plethora of language learning resources and hones the learners’ LSRW Skills. Smart classrooms, interactive white boards, digital language laboratories, multimedia projectors, and computers and so make language learning pleasant, fruitful and efficacious. The benefits of using technology as “learning tool” are manifold. a) It gets rid of monotony and boredom associated with conventional classrooms b) it enables non-native speakers of English to use the language flawlessly by exposing them to the correct accent and pronunciation. c) It stimulates and motivates collaborative learning d) it improves learning efficiency by integrating classroom learning with technology-driven learning d) it brings in variety to the classrooms and evokes the curiosity of the learners to learn a language. E) It makes the learners to be innovative when using the language.

According to R.E. Slavin, educational technology “complements what a great teacher does naturally” and “with ever-expanding content and technology choices, from video to multimedia to the internet,” “there’s an unprecedented need to understand the recipe for success, which involves the learner, the teacher, the content and the environment in which technology is used.”

#### Technology Assisted Language Learning

The new and emerging technologies provide ample opportunities for enhancing the quality of teaching-learning. The far-reaching impact of technology is felt in all spheres, especially in education. Eric Ashby in *The Fourth Revolution* opines that “... the fourth revolution is portended by developments in electronics, notably those involving the radio, television, tape recorder and computer.” (18) He also states that “any technology, which increases the rate of learning, would enable the teacher to teach less and learner to learn more.” (25)

Geeta Padmanabhan in The Hindu MetroPlus dated October 21 2010 opines that "... the essence of technology is its ability to motivate passive listeners to interact, discover and learn creatively through new models and solutions to specific problems..." ([www.thehindu.com/thehindu.in](http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu.in)) Pushplata and Sanjay Kumar are of the view that "... Technology in teaching not only helps to store information, but also allows students to monitor their own learning and continually evaluate their own performance."(33) Language teachers have a pivotal role to play in arousing the learners' interest to employ technology to the maximum for learning a language. According to Howe and Strauss, as the present generation "gravitate toward group activity" (157), teachers need to assign various tasks such as GD, presentation, role plays and so on. Only through the various activities, the teachers enable the learners to become independent and creative. When made to do presentations or take part in GDs, learners will get to know the nuances of a language and how to use it effectively in various contexts. They will learn the art of communicating with a large group of people.

### **Communication Laboratories**

With English gaining the stature of a global language, the need to master it has become important. Linguistic competency is paramount for a professional's career progression. To attain mastery over the language, the four language skills (LSRW) need to be honed. As per a SCANS report of U.S, listening is the first and foremost soft skill mandated by the industry. Language labs serve the above said purpose by providing opportunities to the learners for listening to various passages, answering questions, reading comprehension passages and writing exercises. They also have the provisions/features for recording, repeating and playing the exercises so as to enable the learners to identify their flaws and rectify accordingly.

A teacher console when connected with students' console enables the teachers to interact with the students, assign different lessons to different types of learners (based on their calibre), help the students if required, and eventually monitor their progress. Communication labs ensure language learning by self. Some of the advantages of language labs are: a) they make learners feel comfortable of using the language b) they get rid of the learners' inhibitions and diffidence c) expose them to native accent, and pronunciation d) enable their active participation and e) develop their comprehension, vocabulary and listening skills. A language lab caters to the needs of the individual learners by providing opportunities to enrich their language skills and "promotes motivation to listen; it provides a rich context for authenticity of language use."(Flowerdew & Miller 172) A language lab complements and supports the delivery of material and envisages a lot of flexibility.

### **Learning through Software**

Being interactive and user-friendly, language learning software ensures and creates a congenial learning atmosphere for the learners. The software can be customised according to the requirements and demands of the learners. Depending on the levels of the learners (beginners, intermediate or advanced), a teacher can create and upload various exercises/lessons using audio/video facility and assign to the learners. The teachers can group the students into pairs to facilitate discussions, debates, vocabulary building exercises and the like that promote collaborative learning and "linguistic competency." This will provide autonomy to the learners to learn and use a language with confidence. Some of the features of the software are: a) there is provision for broadcasting any information by the teacher to all learners b) ample scope for forming various student groups and c) provision for evaluation and monitoring the students' progress both by the teacher and the learner d) learners can get rid of any qualms or inhibitions and interact with ease.

### **Power Point Presentations**

Being easily affordable and accessible, slides can be used as tools for quick learning of a language. The advantages of using power point presentations are: a) they instil confidence among the learners b) improve their listening skills c) evoke an interest among the learners to learn a language d) ensure precision and clarity e) improve the language prowess and eventually enhance the learners' language skills. With the aid of power point presentations, non-native speakers of English can get to understand the features and nuances of the language like accent, stress and pronunciation. Power Point Presentations help in improving the retention power of the learners.

### **Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL)**

Computers have become an integral part of all our lives. The role of computers in second language learning and acquisition cannot be undermined. According to Levy, CALL is "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning." Lynne Cameron in his book *Teaching Languages to Young Learners* is of the view that "Computers and the Internet are changing the possibilities for language learning." (244) he further suggests that "... we must be open to new ways of using computers, videos and tools not yet invented, so that what and how we teach in school meshes into their lives." (244)

S.S. Kulkarni in *Introduction to Education Technology* observes: "... The computer is going much beyond. It can perform many functions which no human teacher can perform and those too at a place and time convenient to the learners." (401) Computers equip the learners with necessary skills to communicate with ease and aplomb. They create a congenial learning atmosphere for learning the various aspects of a second language like pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension and so on. The modern technologies transform learners from being mere "passive listeners" to "active users of the language." The integration of computer technology in classrooms will empower and motivate the learners to learn a language collaboratively with their peers.

### **Internet Based Learning (IBL)**

Being the "storehouse of knowledge and information", the Internet provides a mine/wealth of updated information to its users. As of September 2011, India has "one hundred million net users." This only goes to prove the penetration power of the Internet to change the lives of people, especially the youngsters. Learners need to tap the potential of Internet and use it as an "educational tool" for making language learning inclusive, fast-paced and hassle-free. The net provides a plethora of learning/teaching material on various aspects of language like grammar, accent, pronunciation, vocabulary both for the teacher and the learner. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Internet has revolutionized the face of teaching-learning a language. Sites like [www.englishcafe.com](http://www.englishcafe.com), [www.worldenglish.com](http://www.worldenglish.com), [www.about.com](http://www.about.com), [www.nonstopenglish.com](http://www.nonstopenglish.com), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) offer a collection of resources for language learning and development. It goes without saying that the Internet plays a pivotal role in the second language acquisition of the learners.

### **Mobiles as Tools for Language Learning**

Being "easily available, accessible, user friendly and convenient", mobiles can at the best be used as educational tool for language learning. They have provisions for uploading, downloading, browsing material from the Internet, copying and saving files in a portable format. They ensure "any time and any place learning" devoid of the constraints of time, space and distance. Learners can strengthen their vocabulary skills by accessing and learning new words.

Booksellers and publishers like [www.orientblackswan.com](http://www.orientblackswan.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) provides online resources for language learning. Today being highly competitive and globalised era, mere technical prowess alone will not enable employees to go places in their career. They need to be “linguistically competent” in order to gain a strong foothold and attain the pinnacle of success. One of the most important soft skills expected of a professional is his/her linguistic proficiency. English being the second language for many a learner, it is indeed a cumbersome task for non-native speakers to attain mastery over the language. However, this lacuna can be set right/overcome by taking recourse to online dictionaries. They, to a large extent, assist the learners in developing their language skills. Learners can also turn to various educational satellites, blogs for enriching their language skills.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is imperative to supplement conventional teaching-learning of a language by integrating and employing modern technological innovations in the classrooms. Technology ensures a level-playing field by providing different learning experiences for learners, according to their calibre, knowledge and understanding. It creates a congenial learning atmosphere and paves the way for better understanding of the language. Even though a language cannot be mastered in its entirety with technology, it can however, act as a vital resource for language learning. The onus is on the teachers to make effective use of technology so that the learners reap the dividends and become “active users” of the language. A complete transition from the conventional to the modern mode of teaching may not be a possible panacea for the problems encountered in language teaching. On the other hand, an inclusive and integrated approach in classrooms may open up new vistas for teaching a language.

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