An Altercation between a Modernist and Traditionalist on the Issue of using Technology in Language Teaching

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Abstract

The concept of education in general and teaching and learning in question has undergone many a value addition and deletion mostly because of the changes and demands of the changing society and the adoption of innovative delivery mechanism. The content and the form through which knowledge is communicated have got new shapes in education. Hence the use of technology in the domain of education really betters the learning pace and learning outcomes. At the same time we can not underestimate the classical system of education. The personal touch of teacher for solving the problems of students and the real-time environment can happen only in the case of traditional learning. But language teaching can be done using technology without super shading the human teachers. Technology has opened a new avenue to learn the language and use the language. It is now essential to consider how to teach language effectively. Educational researches in general and language teaching researches in question have to be carried out in future in order to understand the cognitive process of learners in the context of technology and also to understand the possibility of exploiting the capabilities of electronic devices for teaching language.

Keywords: Computer Mediated Communication, E-literacy, Multimedia Environment

1. Introduction

The concepts of Education in general and Teaching and Learning in question have changed their colours as they underwent many a value addition and deletion because of the metamorphosis and it let to have paradigm shifts in the domain of Education. This has mostly happened because of the changes and demands of the changing society and the adoption of innovative delivery mechanism. So, the content and the form through which contents have to be imparted have got new shapes in Education. Of course, much has been debated about the use of technology in education and no one can underestimate the robustness of technology in the domain of education. Use of technology really betters the learning pace and learning outcomes.

Why do we go for new technologies when the traditional system itself is able to do the expected objectives?

Anything and everything we are supposed to do involve the use of technology for doing things better and in efficient ways. For example, we have got the concept called e-learning because of the use of electronic devices in the domain of education, which yields a lot fruits like "feeding dynamic content, anytime any where learning, accessibility to remote learners, catering to global audience, structured feedback, self paced learning, learner centric learning and sharing" [2].

These are all some of the benefits, the domain of education enjoys because of the technology. At the same time we can not underestimate the classical system of education. Change is imperative in all respects. Therefore, education has also got some changes to cater to the needs of society.

But it is imperative to keep in mind that the advantage of e-learning can be debated from various perspectives. There are arguments that the use of new technology is not

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balanced across geographies and people are not comfortable with the technology. Some educationalists have even cited the psychological aspect of education as an area that technology does not necessarily address. That is, the personal touch of teacher, for solving the problems of students and the real time environment are very much imperative. These can happen only in the case of traditional learning. But "the imbalanced spread of technology and the cultural barrier like the reluctance of certain people to use technology for the purpose of education should in no way be a reason for not using technology where we can" [3].

So one needs to have a balanced perspective about the positive and revolutionary impact of modern technology especially computer and internet. Moreover, in the educational domain, technology is getting so much attention as it is able to provide answer pertaining to the needs of the socio-economic situation that is changing globally. A teacher has to play around 150 roles in a class room, is it possible for a machine or technology to do all those duties besides doing four important activities viz., presentation, discussion, evaluation and social interaction?

Of course, all these four important activities to be held in a physical classroom can be done in the virtual classroom and most of those 150 roles can also be performed by a machine like computer. But it is not the intention of technology to super shade the teacher; the technology is trying to extend its powerful hands to the teacher to do his job effectively. It does not advice a teacherless education. It always goes along with the teacher. So both teacher and technology have to join hands for ameliorating the present educational scenario.

We have been doing a lot of educational researches based on the traditional educational methods; will they be in no use? No, all those research findings along with the future researches can help us to design technology tapping its capabilities, so as to get the maximum benefit and to economize in the teaching resources and recognize the principles of learner-centeredness. In some contexts, the role of teacher is so weak but technology strengthens him.

2. Language Teaching and Learning

Since the early 1960s language teachers have witnessed dramatic changes in the ways that languages are taught. The focus of instruction has changed from teaching of grammatical structure to communicative ability. Creative self-expression has come to be valued instead of memorized dialogues. Negotiation of meaning has gained more importance than drill practice. Culture has received renewed interest and emphasis. Language textbooks have begun to distinguish spoken and written language forms. In the context of multifarious changes one of the significant areas of innovation in language education is introduction of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) [4].

There is no doubt at all that any subject matter can effectively be taught using all types of technology. But, teaching language which is totally human specific cannot be imparted only through technology. Of course, the technologies can help or improve the learning pace; it would not be at any cost substituted with a human teacher. There are a lot of language related features students can obtain from the teacher, that are totally missing in machine oriented language teaching.

We all know that language is human specific, if you learn a language through machine; of course we will be equipped to use the language with machine not with man. So, we cannot explain the experience of learning a language from human beings. Teacher will be a role model to the students, students can get inspiration from the teacher and they can copy all the mannerisms and style of the teacher with regard to his linguistic behavior. Such features are missing in Technology oriented teaching.

Creativity is one of the salient features which can be had only from human teachers. Obtaining utterances directly from the mouth of teacher will do a lot in the minds of the students. That is missing in e-education. The socio-economic condition does not permit all the language learners to avail such technologies as it is so expensive and requires a lot of prerequisites. The production cost for preparing e-content with ideal features and updating the content in order to have dynamics is comparatively costly. Generally, as the sufficient learning materials are always with the learners in the e-learning domain, they will always postpone the learning. This will in turn affect the learning process. Since the computer oriented language learning provides some other features, it will distract the learning diverting the attention of learners to other aspects. Since the entire learning process of the learner is monitored by the machine, although it encourages them to use the language, the learners may be little bit reluctant in using the language facing the human beings. So the very purpose of learning a language is in vain. Generally the networked multimedia environment has the capabilities of presenting linguistic data in different modes, like, motion and still picture, animation, graphics, voice, text, etc. But great majority of the networked environments are text based as a source of authentic linguistic and cultural data for language learning and as a platform for written networked communication. Moreover the real-time environment is found missing in it.

The ultimate goal of language teaching is to understand the meaning. So the problem is to design the learning environments that take full advantage of the current networked multimedia environments. We have not fully understood what is going on in the minds of the learners, and all the capabilities of the electronic devices which improve language learning.

The interactive technology can be exploited to enable the users to incorporate speech acts, intonation and non-verbal signals into their forms of communication. Since computer oriented language teaching mainly concentrates the written language – especially, the production of learners, the spoken language is given least importance. So the learners may not be in a position to develop both the skills equally.

3. New Avenue for Research

Nowadays technology has opened a new avenue to learn the language and use the language. So an extensive research study has to be carried out for understanding the cognitive process of the learners and for enhancing the capabilities of technology. We have to study the cognitive process involved in learning with hypermedia materials with a view to study, how do the cognitive processes of users in networked multimedia environment differ from those used for purely text based traditional communication. Study has also to be done for understanding the fact that whether providing information in multiple modes create a cognitive over load for certain users. How do learners' interactions differ in written versus spoken on-line discussions and different speech acts and different types of pragmatic signals used in different discussion modes? Do individual differences enable the users to benefit differently from multimedia stimuli? Previously educational thinkers considered how to use information technology in order to teach language, but it is now essential to consider how to teach language using information technology and how to teach language so that learners can make effective use of information technology. We use language not only with human being but also with technology. So, the language teachers should make the best use of new-on-line opportunity to maximize the language study and practice while helping students develop computer based communication and literacy skill. So, the present day language teacher has got some extra burden that the teachers have to choose what types of e-communication strategies should be taught in order to ensure the autonomy of using electronic devices for learning and using the language. Moreover, the teacher should be in a position to know the electronic resources and tools that they have to learn so that they can teach them to their students.

4. New Domain of Language use and Learning

The use of language in totally a new domain, i.e. electronic domain, has changed the colour of language especially the colour of literacy. It is the tradition of language that the mode at which language is used will change the language. For example, the language used in the spoken mode, has got changes while it was used in written mode, similarly, the same language is now used in electronic mode, which consequently changes the colour of language. It is inevitable. Since electronic devices avail the written text predominantly only the written language, rather literacy has got dramatic changes. So the concept of literacy has to be redefined considering the electronic domain.

5. E-literacy

"Literacy is not just the matter of learning how to decode and put to paper letters and words, but rather a matter of mastering processes (Mechanics, Ethnographic and Pragmatic aspects)" [1] that one deemed valuable in particular societies, cultures and contexts. Of course development of printing press redefined the concept of literacy but again, the concept of literacy has been reshaped by the advent of electronic device in general and on-line or www communication in particular. All people willingly or unwillingly have to use computer, most of our reading and writing activities take place on computer screens. This ultimately changes the colour of literacy and in turn language. We have to prepare students for their future rather than our past. Although reading and writing on-line are closely related to reading and writing in print, these two literacy contexts are also sufficiently different to demand theoretical and practical attention. E – Literacy is how people use computer to interpret and express meaning. It can otherwise be called as information literacy i.e. the ability to find, organize and make use of information and also how to read and write in a new medium. To acquire and use e-literacy one should have the knowledge of computer literacy. Both are interdependent and interrelated. Now-a-days, it is imperative to every literate to acquire e-literacy and computer literacy for using language in electronic devices.

In modern days computer mediated communication is a must for everyone. Computer for internet allows us to communicate with people all over the world, simultaneously at

little cost and in an archived format. This allows us to record, reflect on, and refine on previous words as well as those of our interlocutors. Computer mediated communication serves as an intellectual amplifier bringing about a revolution in human interaction and cognition. Computer mediated communication is difficult to master and, if used poorly, it can do as much harm as good. Computer mediated communication requires certain features of typical traditional spoken and written communication [e.g. Forms of solution & greeting and characteristics unique to the computer medium. Its own condensed form symbols]. Computer mediated communication allows individuals to contribute at their own time and space.

If computer literacy is handled well, free-flow of communication will take place, but if it is poorly handled, it will affect the communication. So the users have to develop both the skills simultaneously. Learning how to communicate effectively through computer involves more than just translating from one communication medium to another. So, the competency in traditional literacy may not be useful or usable for e-literacy.

E-literacy involves skills like knowing how to navigate internet sources, how to use search engine effectively for information, and critically evaluate and interpret what is found, making on the spot judgment of content.

Apart from these, the linguistic aspect of literacy has got a sea change in the respect of spelling rules, functions. Even the mechanism, ethnography and pragmatics of literacy have also heavily undergone changes.

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As far as language education is concerned, we cannot fully rely upon electronic devices to teach and use language. The language users however, have to use the language with machine and man, so language teaching can be done using technology without super shading the human teachers.

6. Conclusion

Educational researches in general and language teaching researches in question have to be carried out in future in order to understand the cognitive process of learners in the context of technology and also to understand the possibility of exploiting the capabilities of electronic devices for teaching language. Since teaching through electronic device is in take off stage, it is not able to perform all the activities of human being, but in future, the virtual reality will answer for all the demands.

The concept of literacy has changed drastically as language is used in a totally new domain which requires not only the linguistic aspect of literacy but also the computer literacy. The linguistic aspects and terrain of e-literacy have to be described in detail letting it grow further. The language teacher has got an extra burden as he has to teach e-literacy also to their students, so that the students will be able to use the language in all the domains of language use in the society.

It could be contended that the rapid growth of electronic devices in the domain of language teaching and learning equally complicates the work of the teachers who are trying to map out theories of language and literacy developments. This is because of the fact that changes in teaching material and means lead to change in teaching methods, and it ultimately leads to change in pedagogical value.

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