

LITERARY QUEST



An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Multimedia and Computer Assisted Language Learning

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Abstract

Multimedia utilizes a combination of different content forms displayed or accessed using computerized or electronic devices. In Education, multimedia resources allow the user to go through a series of presentations, text and associated illustrations about a particular topic in various information formats. Multimedia labs not only help the learners acquire a foreign language but also allow them to give a complete makeover to their personality too. A lot of programs in these labs include group discussions, presentations, role plays, personal interview skills etc. Along with this they can sharpen their intellectual capability, enhance creativity, judge their approach to solve various problems and prune their leadership skills through this multimedia infrastructure. It also helps them develop confidence, competence and command over English language, thus making them a perfect professional.

Keywords

Multimedia in Language Learning; Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL); English Language Teaching



In world today, which is highly competitive and materialistic, speed and global access are the two key outcomes of technological advancement. These improvements necessitate amongst us, redefinition of skills, which help in shaping an individual's personality. An individual is not only required to hone his skill-set but also to develop English communicative expertise. It becomes a necessary requisite as English is affirmed as an International Link Language.

As English is a foreign language in Indian context, there is a number of divergences such as social, cultural, psychological and linguistic when compared to native language. It is high time that the language is given high priority to facilitate students to make them employable and help them climb the ladder of growth and success. The study pattern itself has evolved and the most progressive educational institutions around the country have taken laudable efforts to add a few novel strategies of functional usage of the language in their curriculum. In order to replace traditional lecture method in language learning, many of the institutions focus on interactive learning methodology.

Every learner is an individual with different needs and abilities of learning a language. Traditional methods of teaching a language placed the teacher in a role of a transmitter of knowledge while learners were seen as passive recipients of this knowledge. With the advent of communicative method of language teaching, the focus in the classroom shifted from the teacher to the learner. Current trends in the field of English language teaching focus on learner autonomy, learner involvement, learner generated syllabi, creation of relaxed atmosphere for learning and training to relate to need based training. (Jayachandran 6)

Jayachandran rightly observes the importance of interactive learning and the learner centered approach, and how the focus has shifted to student friendly methodologies.

One must understand the process that one goes through while learning any language before examining the various techniques that may be employed for teaching English language. Language is a skill that one acquire from the

environment and through practice, but not something that one inherits. To acquire the English language we must first create an amicable environment where learners hear, listen to, imitate and speak the language on a regular basis. As English language is hardly used in day to day business, creating an ambience plays a very vital role. It is the primary aspect that is to be emphasized as proficiency in a language can be achieved only through regular practice and usage. It is a wondrous learning process where a learner learns without fear of any evaluation or embarrassment. It is emphasized that even the development of English language skills should aim at assisting the functional use of English. Programmes such as these should cover all aspects of language skills such as LSRW that is learning, speaking, reading and writing.

To equip the learners of English Language and to achieve the desired consequences, there is a need to develop and to provide a proper infrastructure to the learners of English language. It is only at this juncture there arises a dire requirement of multimedia equipped language laboratories which ultimately becomes mandatory. These labs not only help generate the necessary environment where one listens to the language on a regular basis but also imparts the practice required for its acquisition.

Multimedia technology exemplified today by the CD-ROM allows a variety of media (text, graphics, sounds, animation and video) to be accessed on a single machine. What makes multimedia even more powerful is that it also entails hypermedia. It means that the multimedia resources are all linked together and that learners can navigate their own path simply by pointing and clicking a mouse.

(Warschauer 3)

Language Learning in the past decade has expanded dramatically because of the introduction of multimedia resulting in the development of specific areas of research like cognitive load and the multimedia learning. The multimedia component and the Computer Assisted Language Learning provides a platform for a student to analyze his own progress and helps them rate their own performance continuously imparting valuable feedback. The course contents of

such multimedia language labs are so designed that it pursues a parallel structure. Such structure allows a novel concept to be introduced, which is Instructor Led Training (ILT) sessions which is followed by practice sessions through innovative approaches in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) sessions. One cannot deny the fact that multimedia language laboratories certainly provides us with extraordinary gadgets and devices to organize, observe and converse with the learners.

First of all, a more learning authentic environment is created, since listening is combined with seeing, just like in the real world. Secondly the skills are easily integrated, since the variety of media make it natural to combine reading, writing, speaking and listening in a single activity. Third students have great control over their learning, since they cannot only go at their own pace but even on their own individual path, going forward and backwards to different parts of the program, honing in on a particular aspect and skipping other aspects altogether. While the main lesson is in the foreground, students can have an access to a variety of background links which will allow them a rapid access to grammatical explanations or exercises, vocabulary glosses, pronunciation information or questions or prompts which encourage them to adopt an appropriate learning strategy. (Meiers 32)

Language labs comprise the curriculum based content for all categories of learners, who are almost intermediates and are equipped with functional vocabulary and structures, with a need to perfect their pronunciation, accent correction, voice modulation with grammatical accuracy, these labs also offer certain programs that help develop fluency, accuracy and confidence in using English. For people who can be categorized as advanced learners and have fairly good language and who require just an appropriate and effective usage of the language in professional situations, these labs offer programs to enhance verbal communication skills, to increase speech fluency and idea formulation, role plays, group discussions, mock interviews and presentations, telephonic

etiquettes, news listening and comprehension etc. With the help of such courses the learners are able to acquire fluency for the professional purposes such as group discussions, interviews, appraisals, brain storming, and independently draft letters, reports, proposals and summaries. For people with no formal exposure to English or who have studied English only as a second language and who witness a lot of problems in basic communication and expression of thought in routine situations, these labs offer the various programs which suit the beginners.

The grammar sessions in these programmes emphasize on basics of grammar and its constructs that allows a natural acquisition of grammar as well as vocabulary. Extensive practice with audio visuals in listening, speaking helps them shut out the influence of first language.

There are a number of benefits of using these multimedia language labs as a medium of instruction. Multimedia labs covers all the aspects of language learning such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, free speech, intonation and modulation and remedies to relieve the pupils from the influences of the mother tongue. Multimedia increases the teacher student interaction because it provides ample number of channels to communicate i.e. video chat, text chat, voice chat. It also incorporates a lot of audio visual elements.

Multimedia labs enhance the retention level of the students because the students can watch the lessons visually as compared to just being a passive listener. They get an opportunity to watch even the missed pre- recorded classes and presentations. The full featured archives also contribute in revising the lessons any time. Important classroom sessions can also be recorded for the future reference.

These labs deliver an opportunity for the students to keep a tab on their own learning. The software involved let the pupil work according to his capacity and also provides instant feedback for constant improvement. Multimedia labs can compensate for the shortage or lack of experienced faculty. The recorded lectures through digital libraries can be used where the expert teachers are not available. Even the live interactive lectures by experts can also be broadcasted.

It also empowers the learners to self-assess because of its unique feature of listening –recording and comparing which again provides an opportunity for self-evaluation. The learners can also track their own progress through the course and generate personalized performance reports. In a way such infrastructure helps the learners to sharpen their abilities along with providing privacy during practice with no embarrassment or fear of evaluation by their peers or superiors.

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