TEACHING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS BY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FRAMED TECHNIQUES

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the dimensions of integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching business communication skills in an engineering context. Though Information and Communication Technology ICT has already found its place in the communication skills training, this paper would focus on the innovative pedagogy that can be implemented in teaching Business English to fine tune and polish communication skills of the language learners. It showcases the recommendations and concepts based upon the technical expertise of engineers. Students need to understand the weightage given to communication skills which varies from industry to industry such as: expressing ideas in interpersonal contexts, negotiating in business terms, or even understand the verbal and non-verbal behavior of others. On the teacher's part the different approaches adopted for teaching communication skills can enhance a student's potential from "learner to a leader." The paper focuses on the inclusion of teaching strategies such as: designing activities, tasks or projects by synthesizing the potential of ICT—digital resources, internet communications and interactive multimedia to deepen understanding and promote critical thinking. Thus, ICT integrated English Language Teaching (ELT) in technical context would help learners to communicate even in the context of geographical distancing that remains to be a part of global scenario.

The art of communication is the language of leadership.

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Introduction

The ability to communicate is the primary factor that distinguishes human beings from animals. And it is the ability to communicate well that distinguishes one individual from another. Communication is essentially transfer of ideas, messages or information from one person to another. It is effective when it gets the desired action or response. Basic communication skills are essential for continued success, on both personal and professional front. Therefore, it is imperative for the technical students to develop good communication skills in order to be influential in the organization. It is also because they play a significant role in driving innovations and leading teams.

The prime focus of this paper will be to explore the different dimensions of integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching business communication skills to engineering students. Many studies over the past twenty years have attempted to measure the impact of the introduction of new information and communication technologies on the second language performance of learners (Higgins, 1983; Lonergan, 1984; Penington, 1989; Cobb, 1997; Gonzalez and Perez, 2000). Such studies have traditionally regarded ICT essentially within Crook's framework of computer-as-tutor, computer-as-pupil and computer-as-tool, with in each case, the computer and, more recently, broader interpretations of ICT, being placed at the disposal of the teacher and/or learner, to be exploited as effectively as possible in pursuit of a clearly specified goal (Crooks, 1994).

Though Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has already found its place in the communication skills training this paper would focus on using innovative pedagogy that can be implemented in Business English to fine tune and polish the strong communication skills necessary to showcase the recommendations and concepts based upon the technical expertise of engineers having a direct and effective impact on overall corporate strategies. In order to transform a "learner to a leader" a teacher needs to adopt innovative teaching pedagogy like designing the activities, tasks or projects by synthesizing the potential of ICT—digital resources, internet communications and interactive multimedia to deepen understanding and promote critical thinking. It is also seen that the use of ICT in the language learning has an impact well beyond classroom as students not only develop linguistic and socio-cultural expertise through ICT but also acquire ICT related skills through the target language. On this basis, it could equip the individual to "participate fully in all aspects of modern society" (Kaspar, 2000; 105) within a "dynamic and ongoing process of perpetual transformation" (Neilson, 1989; 5).

Understanding Leadership Communication

Communication is the exchange of information or ideas. It is the art or act of expressing a message in a way that allows others to understand, but effective communication involves using appropriate voice and body-language, understanding the situation and the people involved in it and above all responding appropriately. Communication takes place in different modes and

different situations like formal, semiformal and informal and this determines the style of language to be used in communication. Any leader to communicate must necessarily understand the nuances of communication which owns cultural variations and therefore inappropriate use of language, incorrect sentences, vocabulary or phrases, inappropriate use of language, inability to hear nonstandard accents shall lead to miscommunication. The comfort zone of speaking with our friends and family is challenged in a professional world. A simple act of initiating a conversation, taking turns or interrupting a conversation or even sustaining and closing a conversation may need to switch roles. Social conversations can be broadly divided as interactional (chatting) and transactional (asking for information), the first one conversing without a specific purpose and the other for specific information. Leaders and their style of communication are demanded to express opinion/view point on certain issues that may make tremendous difference in the industrial scenario. Thus the issue arises how to groom learners from technical backgrounds to leaders in the art of communication in both verbal (written and oral) and non-verbal (appearance and gestures) communication to transfer effective communication.

Design of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Curricula

English is the lingua-franca of corporate India. Many leaders are unable to do justice to their talent because of the disability in communicating effectively. What is intended can be misinterpreted by shirk of shoulders that convey boredom confusion or irritation in their communication. Teachers today face the problem of falling standards in English language and lack of motivation among ESL students and thus find it difficult to raise the proficiency level of learners in English Language. ICT becomes a powerful tool for discovery based and problem oriented learning, allowing students to construct new understandings through ICT (Pachler, 2006; 94). ICT framed pedagogy can empower the students to be in control of their own learning. Unlike the focus on completing the syllabus and focusing on exams, the ICT integrated curriculum would focus on to produce individuals who not only would be proficient in the application of their language skills but also team players who can take charge to solve problems thus developing their leadership skills. The other advantages of including ICT include: improvement in memory retention, increased motivation and generally deepen understanding (Dede, 1998). It also promotes collaborative learning, including role playing, group problem solving activities and articulated projects (Forcheri and Molfino, 2000). ICT is also promoting new approaches to working and learning, new ways of interacting (Balacheff, 1993), sharing of resources and learning environment, and also greater learner autonomy (Forsyth, 1996).

ICT framed pedagogy can empower the students to be in control of their own learning. Unlike the focus on completing the syllabus and focusing on exams, the ICT integrated curriculum would focus on to produce individuals who not only would be proficient in the application of their language skills but also team players who can take charge to solve problems thus developing their leadership skills. Besides, it is a generation where computer and computer aided technology has become an inevitable part of organizations. Therefore, teaching English language communication using computer and computer aided technologies is necessary.

Most of the business is done by e-mails, video- conferencing, chatting etc. due to distant location of sites. Direct verbal communication becomes impossible and this is where computer and

telephonic communication takes place. Being technically sound and good subject knowledge does not guarantee students great jobs or promotions, it has been noticed that sometimes more than technical knowledge efficient communication gives better results. Therefore, teaching communication skills that has its usage in real life situations id needed. For this teaching by ICT framed techniques or computer aided communication can prove to be very useful for engineering students.

The role of teacher will certainly change with the usage of ICT based teaching. He has to be more informed as the traditional teaching resources like the backboard and chalk or overhead projectors will become obsolete. It will be no longer sufficient for a teacher to be imparter of content knowledge. He has to encourage critical thinking skills, promote information literacy and nurture collaborative learning and working practices in order to prepare engineering students for a new world where no job is guaranteed for a lifetime and people switch careers several times and up gradation becomes the need of the hour.

Activities

Activities are different from tasks as it is guided by specific terms and strategies. Activities need to be sorted to the level of learners according to their proficiency and category of the language to be achieved. The linguistic competence of the learners can be balanced by introducing vocabulary games, grammar tests and quizzes, listening to clippings of video or films which involves both verbal and visual and thus motivates the learners and grabs their attention and interest. ICT offers a wide range of materials and acts as a resource person to teacher. Free downloadable sites from the internet do provide adequate range of materials like pictures, projects, exercises, audio and video materials for beginners to advanced level are all materials and tools for teaching and learning process. When leadership communication is the aim teachers can easily stream line the activities so demanded like audio and videos ranging from speeches of corporate leaders, politicians, academicians can be highly instructive for learning the art of persuasive communication and impressive body language.

Tasks

Though a wide range of tasks can be made available to engage students, ICT integrated tasks can enhance creativity and innovation which is essentially the quality of any leader. When activities can form the base the set up of written and oral tasks that focus on reading and writing activities should be dealt separately in a classroom atmosphere.ICT reveals open the world of industry/ corporate in seconds which otherwise only had been possible to find its place in the mind of the learner and now can be accessed with the movement of the finger-tip. Communication can be practiced in tools and technology applied in business settings from telephonic communication to video-conferencing. A language lab with Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), or Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) would facilitate this learning. Multi-media techniques with relevant software would promote learning in similar contexts.

Projects

Projects students complete in the engineering contexts expose them to real life situations and thus the students gain a hand on experience to implement in it. Engineers' professional tasks may vary from presenting to negotiating and thus wide exposure in different areas but the target in integrating it to English teaching context is to expose them to cross cultural contexts with a real-life exposure and thus virtual worlds provide the learners with this platform. Speaking activities in this area would enhance the style of presentation. **Video Conferencing and Videotaping** Videotaping is used in areas such as acting and sports to help performers analyse their abilities and perfect their skills. This technique can be used for students to bring out their weaknesses, introduce them to their body language and other kinds of imperfections which can be corrected by analyzing their videotapes. The entire process of students enactment videotaped can be assessed overall by the language trainer and learner. The Video conferencing can be conducted in language labs and this can be useful in introducing the students how to communicate in a virtual world.

Conclusion

With English giving Indians a huge advantage in global economy, it is natural that more and more students are opting to acquire all the important language skills that are necessary to place themselves in the front rank of successful business professionals. As teachers of English language we therefore, need to focus on improving our teaching methods and innovating new ones methods that will successfully work for our students and upgrade them to face challenges of the real world. ICT framed techniques is a new way of teaching English language and communication to engineering students, different from the stereotype teaching of language. Computer aided teaching and learning is important for engineering students as it exposes them to the usage of computer and gives them confidence for their professional life. Rapid advancement in technology will ensure that ICT will proliferate in the classroom. It is predicted that there will be many benefits for both the learner and the teacher, including the promotion of shared working space and resources, better access to information, the promotion of collaborative learning and radically new ways of teaching and learning. ICT will also require a modification of the role of the teacher, who in addition to classroom teaching will have other skills and responsibilities. Many will become specialists in the use of distributed learning techniques, the design and development of shared working spaces and resources, and virtual guides for students who use electronic media. Ultimately, the use of ICT will enhance the learning experiences for children, helping them to think and communicate creatively. ICT will also prepare our children for successful lives and careers in an increasingly technological world. The activities, tasks and projects thus designed for engineering students shall be designed for them would be to address the specific needs of undergraduates. The outcome of such learning is to compete effectively for professional careers in the field by using problem based learning. It is a student centered teaching technique that emphasizes meaningful learning through the solution of open-ended problems carried out in group/team.

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