

Emerging Technologies and the Evolving Roles of Language Teachers: An Overview

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Abstract

The tremendous growth of technology has significantly affected the field of education and specifically language teaching and learning. The adoption of information and communication technology along with the latest technological trends in language teaching is phenomenal. On one hand, the successful integration of technology in language teaching has significantly improved the learning outcome by making the teaching and learning process active, interesting, interactive and engaging and, on the other hand, it has brought a paradigm shift in the system of education and in the roles of both teacher and students. The present paper focuses on importance of integration of emerging technology to language teaching and learning. Majorly, it attempts to highlight the evolution in the roles of a teacher which is the demand of present time and which could protect a teacher from getting redundant in the classroom. It also discusses the importance of teachers being equipped with ICT skills and the continuous updating and upgradation of the skills for effective integration of technology in teaching.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Educational Technology, Emerging technologies, Evolving roles of teachers, ICT skills.

Introduction

There has been a remarkable growth in Information and Communication Technology over the past few decades and the significance of it in the field of education cannot be neglected. Both technology and globalization have brought a significant change in the social and educational environment. The internet has brought together people from different parts of the globe with different cultures and languages. One of the great advantages of globalisation and advancement in technology is that the learners get more opportunities for language learning in real life situations. The rapid development in the field of technology has made language learning easier and autonomous. Now learners can easily enhance their language skills with the help of emerging technologies at their own pace, space and time. Our students are definitely more tech- savvy than the teachers and so they are more exposed to the target language and the native speakers of the target language through several applications and softwares. They have access to the world's entire information through their smart phones. In this dynamic environment where learners have access to information and learning resources, can chat with the native speakers of the target language virtually and thus get exposed to the target language and can also learn through free video lectures by experts on YouTube, the language teachers have to evolve their roles with the ever-advancing technologies. They need to keep themselves updated and upgraded in order to work effectively in the evolving educational and social environment. In the present scenario, being proficient in the target language is not the only prerequisite for being an effective teacher but

being competent in using technology in classroom is also equally important. In this paper, we will examine the paradigm shift in the roles of teachers which the adoption of technology in language learning demands for and also how the language teachers brave the emerging technologies by being equipped with the required technological knowledge and skills.

Significance of Emerging Technologies in Language Learning

It would be justifiable to say that incorporation of emerging technologies enhances foreign language teaching and learning. It makes the teaching and learning of foreign language easy, active and interesting (Skinner and Austin,1999) In this context, Warchauer (2004) asserts that one quantifiable benefit to increase motivation is that students tend to spend more time on tasks when on computer. The language learners are no more passive with the integration of ICT tools in foreign language learning.

In addition, the internet provides language learners with the opportunity to use the target language in more authentic context. The Internet provides authentic materials for language study and the learners can easily get connected with the native speakers of the target language through the ever-advancing technologies like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Google Hangout and many more.

Further, with the rapid development of Internet and communication technologies, the learners have access to exponentially growing store house of information and people of the same interest areas which help teachers and learners in the process of teaching and learning. But with the boon of access to abundance of information, there is a possibility of being misguided with some resource materials which are unauthentic and wrong as misinformation and inaccuracies are equally present in great number on the internet. Therefore, a judicious selection of materials also becomes very important at this point.

It also promotes all the basic language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing in real life situations.

Evolving Roles of Language Teacher

From the above discussion, we saw the significance of incorporating technology in education. It gives access to endless information and resources. It provides autonomy to the students as they can study at their own pace, space and time. It is equally beneficial to the teachers as with the easy availability of the resources, teachers can plan their lessons well. Not only this, they can select more effective and influential resources to make the lesson active, engaging and interesting. The use of technology not only helps them plan lessons effectively but with its help they can store and retrieve their teaching material easily and thus save their valuable time.

Though technology in education has come as a blessing but there is also an obvious apprehension in our minds that technology will replace the teacher or will curb the need for teachers in classroom. It would be wrong to think that technology makes a teacher redundant. In fact, the involvement of a teacher is very important to facilitate the smooth flow of a lesson and to have a control of the lesson. The involvement of a teacher in the use of technology in teaching makes the learning effective with better learning outcomes. So the emerging technologies in education cannot make the role of teachers redundant if they keep themselves updated with the current trends and keep evolving and redefining their roles as teachers. As it is quite obvious that the proliferation of technology in education will demand change in the patterns of teaching and learning and it is the necessity and demand of time to evolve with the change.

According to Brandl, 2002, information and communication technology can be effective only with the teacher’s role as “facilitator” who plans and guides the lesson. Therefore, to use the modern technology effectively, the language teacher must also be prepared to assume new roles. Supporting the same idea, Canado (2010) also asserts that the foreign language teacher functions as counselor, tutor, mentor, facilitator and observer. “The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and on the Role of Teachers of Foreign Language”, a report commissioned by the Directorate General of Education and Culture of the European Commission, 2003 very clearly illustrates the change in the roles of teachers with the introduction of ICT in education. As per the report, the roles that a teacher shall adopt for effective deployment of emerging technologies in language teaching are of a facilitator, guide, researcher, integrator, designer, collaborator, learner and evaluator. The same idea of the evolution or shift in the roles of a teacher has been presented by Louis Cohen, et. al. where he differentiates between the traditional role of teacher to that of their new roles for the significant incorporation of latest technologies in language learning and education broadly.

This idea of evolving roles of teachers in the current scenario has also been supported by other researchers and scholars. It has also been accepted that adoption of new technology in the teaching and learning process shifts the emphasis from teaching to learning and creates a more interactive and engaging learning environment for teachers and learners. This new teaching and learning environment calls for a change in the roles of both teachers and students (Senapati, 2009). Senapati, in his article, has explicitly illustrated the evolving roles of teachers and students using a table adapted from Newby et.al. The table shows the change of the roles of teachers from knowledge transmitter to that of learning facilitator, guide, knowledge navigator and co-learner with students. So we can rightly say that integration of emerging technologies in education and language learning has not made the teachers obsolete in class or have diminished or subdued the role and importance of teachers in the teaching and learning process, Rather, it has redefined the roles of teachers and has given them an opportunity to change and update themselves with the change in the education system, to become digitally literate and broaden the spectrum of their efficiency in terms of lesson planning so that they integrate these technologies in their lesson to make their class lively, interesting, motivating and engaging.

Changes in Teacher’s Role	
A shift from:	A shift to:
Knowledge transmitter, primary source of information, content expert and source of all answers	Learning facilitator, collaborator, coach, mentor, knowledge navigator and co-learner
Teacher controls and directs all aspects of learning	Teacher gives students more options and responsibilities for their own learning
Changes in Student’s Role	
A Shift from:	A shift to:
Passive recipient of information	Active participant in the learning process

Reproducing knowledge	Producing and sharing knowledge, Participating at times as expert
Learning as a solitary activity	Learning collaboratively with others

(Senapati, 2009)

From the above discussion, it can be inferred that the use of ICT and current technologies in language learning has brought a shift in the education environment by making it more student-centric unlike before. There has been a paradigm shift from teacher centred learning environment to student centred learning environment and consequently it has made the teaching and learning process active, motivating, interactive, engaging, interesting and collaborative.

What is more important to pay attention to is that technology does not bear any educational value in itself. It cannot work effectively on its own unless it is used effectively and creatively. Having said that, it becomes very clear that it is the teacher who is one of the important factors that determine the successful adoption of technologies in teaching because they are the ones who actually use technological tools in actual classroom situations. However, the effective use of technology in teaching and learning process completely depends on teachers' attitude and belief towards technology and their attitude towards integration of technology in education is directly proportional to their knowledge and competency in using technology in teaching and learning process (Lim & Khine, 2006, Zhang, 2007 and Paraskeva, et.al, 2008). Hence, it can be suggested that for successful and effective integration of technology in language teaching and learning or in education broadly, it is very important to train the teachers and make them competent enough to use the current technological tools in their classrooms effectively and creatively because lack of exposure, training and experience of using technology in teaching are the main factors that build negative attitude of teachers towards technology which consequently inhibit the acceptance, adoption and incorporation of it.

Pre-service and In-service Teachers Training

So, the time demands the teachers to get themselves updated and upgraded to walk parallel with the ever-advancing technological trends. It has become important for the teachers to upgrade their knowledge and to acquire competency in using the technological tools efficiently and effectively. The basic digital or ICT skills a teacher should possess are that they should be able to; operate computers and use basic software and applications, evaluate educational software, create effective computer based interesting presentation, evaluate the authenticity of information received and make wise, critical choice of information from the internet and design technology integrated lessons.

Hence, it becomes very important for the teachers to get proper training so that they get well equipped with skills that are essential for technology enhanced language teaching and learning. It is very important to include ICT skills or computer literacy in the curriculum of teacher training courses. Upgrading and updating the in-service teachers with current technological trends is equally important because technology is advancing every day and many softwares, devices and their functions get either updated, advanced or obsolete with time. This effort will keep each and every teacher quite updated with the current technological trends which would lead to the effective and successful integration of emerging technologies in teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

In this world of ever advancing technology, it has become very essential for the language teachers to be computer literate and well trained in important computer skills that are required to make a class effective. Here best fits the Darwinian evolutionary theory ‘Survival of the Fittest’, according to which only the fittest survives in a system. Similarly, only the fittest (i.e. the updated, active and well trained and skilled) teacher can survive in this evolving educational and social system. The teachers need to be facilitators who help the learner to learn the lesson well rather than being a monitor/ dictator as in the traditional teacher centred learning environment. In addition to this, a teacher needs to be a guide, researcher, designer, collaborator, learner and evaluator. They have to be highly technology literate, consistently active and involved in research so that they remain updated with recent changes and new knowledge in their concerned fields. There is a necessity to fill the generation gap between the teachers and students for more communication to happen for effective teaching and learning.

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