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**Getting Exposure to Input in Multimedia
Language Laboratory -
A Pleasurable Learning Experience**

R. Joseph Ponniah, Ph.D.

Getting Exposure to Input in Multimedia Language Laboratory - A Pleasurable Learning Experience

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Abstract

The paper examines the learning experience of adult ESL students in an input rich digital multimedia language laboratory and their attitude towards the application of multimedia in language learning. Responses of the students to the research questions on a questionnaire and the data collected through discussions reveal that the use of multimedia resources has given a pleasurable learning experience. It has also helped them to get exposure to comprehensible input.

Keywords: Comprehensible input; Multimedia; Language acquisition; ESL; Free Voluntary Surfing.

Introduction

Students learning English as a Second Language have a few opportunities to use the language outside classrooms. Teachers do their best to create opportunities in classrooms to make students use the language by motivating them to work on exercises and assigning group work. During class hours, only highly motivated students will volunteer to practice one-on-one with teachers and peers and the rests of them did execute inhibition to speak.

Why This Fear of Speaking?

This is because students are plagued by lack of confidence, shyness, fear of committing mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. Fear of speaking or making mistakes while producing output is the result of incomplete acquisition. Krashen (2008) claims that fear of speaking means that learners are about to try to say something that they have not acquired or do not yet have the ability to say.

Importance of Input

In order to acquire language, learners have to get exposure to comprehensible input. Technology is opening up many new possibilities to provide input. Integrating

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technology into ESL curriculum and using it as a key tool will certainly sustain the interest of students to acquire the language with great interest.

Tools

Technology use or multimedia is not a teaching method or theory but is a tool that aids teachers improving access to different types of media already in use and it is used to simulate real-life situations and helps learners to have control over the learning process (O'Leary 1998). Therefore, there must be complementary relationship between SLA research and CALL practice to create a successful language learning environment (Carol 1996).

Krashen (2007) claims that using computers for Free Voluntary Surfing will encourage students wander through the Internet and read what interests them. Krashen also claims that it will result in higher levels of literacy. Computer assisted language learning provides new opportunities for learners to engage in active communication that facilitates the development of second language competences (Peterson, 2005). Multimedia-assisted language learning and Internet-based instruction contribute to EFL students' cross cultural competence (Kim, 2005). Computer-Enhanced Language Learning will enable learners to pool their knowledge in effective ways and enhance peer correction and language repair work. Computers enable learners to work on their own pace. (Hoven, 1999).

The comprehension hypothesis (Krashen 2004) claims that language acquisition does not occur when learners focus on form. It happens only when they engage with the messages they are conveying and understanding. The hypothesis states that the process of comprehension and acquisition are closely related.

If second language learning environment contains more comprehensible input, it will facilitate language acquisition. Students who receive more input consistently outperformed the subjects who receive less. Readers who get exposure to written input easily outperformed non-readers on a grammar test and on a reading and writing test (Ponniah 2008). Adult EFL students participating in three extensive reading programs outperformed the comparison subjects who participated in traditional form-based classes (Mason & Krashen, 1997).

The Focus of This Paper

This paper is based on the hypothesis that digital multimedia language laboratory could be used as an effective tool to provide comprehensible input that facilitates language acquisition.

Digital Multimedia Language Lab

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Multimedia is a computer-based system that uses various types of content such as text, audio, video, animation, graphics and interactivity. Technologies used in the language lab to create a new learning experience are:

1. Teacher console with functions to control students nodes (a computer used as a server)
2. Students' nodes (computers used by students)
3. Digital multimedia language lab software for connecting the nodes with the teacher console.
4. Headphone sets and microphones
5. Multimedia packages, etc.
6. Internet access

The integration of both visual and auditory channels helps students sharpen the listening skill. The interest of students is renewed as they listen to comprehension exercises with the aid of the sophisticated multimedia technology. "Multimedia applications for foreign language learning can provide a more realistic picture of the new language and culture in the classroom, including not only linguistic but also paralinguistic features such as body language, gestures, prosody, etc. which help to convey meaning to the learners" (Brett 1995; Fidelman 1997; Gassin 1992; Hurley 1992 cited in Verdugo, 2007 p. 87).

Exposure to Culture

Students cannot be competent in learning a foreign language, if they do not have exposure to the culture that has shaped the language. If they watch interesting programs of native speakers, they will get exposure to their culture, linguistic structures and sound patterns of the language. This will enable them to acquire language with great interest. Students can also strengthen their pronunciation by listening to the speeches of native speakers

Increased Opportunity for Participation

In traditional classrooms, only motivated students will get an opportunity to interact in pairs and in small groups, but, in technology enhanced environment, more number of students will get this opportunity. The multimedia language lab will be an ideal place to motivate them to involve in group discussions. Practicing group discussion in classrooms has limitations. The technology will, thus, increase students' opportunities for collaboration and active participation. This type of exercises will certainly provide input to students and it will help them improve communication skills.

Students can take tests on computer screens. A huge collection of exercises and questions stored in multimedia test packages can be installed in the teacher console. The

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teacher can select questions from a multimedia package and can send them to students' nodes. After they have taken a test, the computer will value the test as it is already programmed in the multimedia package. Multimedia test packages offer quick and reliable assessment of the language proficiency of students. They can also take tests from CD ROMs. This does not require any assistance of teachers and they can work independently. The teachers' job is to check the answers and to monitor the progress of students. The role of a teacher remains almost the same as that of a facilitator.

The Study

Participants

The data was collected from eighteen third year undergraduate ESL students from an engineering college affiliated to Anna University, Tirunelveli, India. Subjects had studied English for ten years at school, with a focus on learning rules of grammar. They had also spent more time on memorizing chunks of ideas to meet the requirement of examinations and had only little exposure to comprehensible input. Discussion with the students indicated that they are not interested in attending traditional form-based classes. They were not aware that getting exposure to input is a basic requirement for language acquisition.

Treatment procedure

The treatment period lasted three months (one semester), three periods a week in a digital multimedia language laboratory. Subjects were given awareness that they need to get exposure to aural and written input for language acquisition. They were encouraged to listen to programs and to read text if only they could understand and they were also advised not to spend time on items, which were incomprehensible. Subjects were not given any assigned task and were given freedom to do any exercise that interests them.

At the end of the treatment period, the students were given a questionnaire containing two questions to assess the learning experience and to know how effectively they make use of the resources.

1. Did the language laboratory provide you a new learning experience?
2. How did you make use of the technology and the resources of the lab?

In addition to the responses of the subjects to the two research questions, data was collected through informal discussions.

Results

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Responses of all the participants to the first question revealed that the language laboratory had provided a pleasurable learning experience. Their answers to the second question and the data collected through informal discussions confirmed that they showed positive attitudes towards the integration of multimedia in language learning. In fact, the new learning environment had given more pleasure while learning and it had highly motivated them to make use of resources effectively.

Discussions with the subjects revealed that they were interested to learn the language in a multimedia language laboratory that contained more comprehensible input. They expressed that the traditional language classes did not encourage them to experience input.

Responses to the second research question “How did you make use of the technology and the resources of the lab?”

1. I like this lab hour because I can work independently using multimedia packages
2. In the beginning I was quite nervous and later I enjoyed learning English language through computer.
3. I enjoy listening to the programs of native speakers because it will help me improve my pronunciation.
4. In addition to learning the language, I can learn to use a computer effectively.
5. Since I was taught that input is a basic requirement for acquiring language I engaged in programs that interests me.
6. We had discussions in group through computers.
7. I listened to the pronunciation chart and some of the exercises on phonetics.
8. I like these language lab classes. I surfed the net and read web pages.
9. The lab hours gave me confidence to express my ideas in English.
10. Just read and listened to something
11. I listened to digital stories and did some exercises with the support of CD ROMs.
12. I browsed the net and engaged in language learning activities.
13. I read and listened to some exercises.
14. I like this new learning environment and it is pleasurable to work independently.
15. It is enjoyable to learn here.
16. I get pleasure to get exposure to language through CD ROMs.
17. I am interested in reading short stories on the net.
18. I worked on listening and reading comprehension.

Some responses were edited, without affecting the intended meaning of the subjects to enhance comprehensibility.

Discussion

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The application of multimedia in language learning had developed independence and autonomy of the students and it had given confidence. They expressed their happiness that they could listen and read exercises of interests and they could work on their own pace. The integration of multimedia in ESL classes has given a pleasurable learning experience.

The subjects showed positive attitudes in taking tests in the lab because the answers were valued by computers and they could see their performance on tests on computer screens. In fact, they had inhibitions in taking tests with pen and paper in classrooms because they were afraid that the mistakes committed by them would be seen by the teachers and peers.

Participation of the students in electronic group discussions was encouraging. The subjects were interested in forming small groups for discussions and they found group discussions more interesting and stimulating because they had the freedom to generate own ideas. The meaningful interaction in the communicative environment is a good source of input.

Conclusion

The results showed that the technology-enhanced learning motivated the students to learn the language with interest. They experienced autonomy and independence in the language lab. Students, who showed less interest in learning the language in traditional classes, showed positive attitudes in the language lab because they are inspired by the marvelous functions of the technology and they received more comprehensible input that facilitated acquisition.

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