A Plea for the Use of Language Portals in Imparting Communication Skills

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Abstract

Teachers of English as a medium of communication in India toil desperately to find suitable methodologies to facilitate the students in acquiring the communication skills. In the recent past, the number of teachers using Computer-Assisted Language Teaching has increased markedly and the role of technology in education in the 21st century is widely discussed. This paper is intended to analyze the multifaceted use of Internet as an interactive teaching medium to impart communication skills to the Indian learners and also to explore the possibilities of integrating Internet in the field of English language teaching in India. A list of useful websites is presented which could be used for various teaching, learning and testing purposes.

Introduction

Advancement in computers, in digital memory, in Internet resources, in audio and visual transmission, in virtual imaging, wire and wireless communication has created new slabs for the use of technology in the teaching of English. Web publishing, digital archives, digital video, electronic conferencing, blogging, wikis, podcasting, real simple syndication feeds, on-line gaming, virtual reality worlds are the potential new tools for teaching and learning English. MySpace and Face book and other social sites also become important tools. These may be successfully used as a forum to teach English. However, technology is rather overwhelming to harness, somewhat like trying to get a drink of water from a gushing fire hydrant (Warschauer and Whittaker l995). In order to make effective use of new technologies, teachers must equip themselves with some basic e-pedagogical skills.

Merge Conventional Methodology with Internet Resources

By merging the conventional methodology with emerging technology, we can improve learning and performance. In higher education, the application of language learning portals and existing multimedia tools may be more suitable to the adult students. Instruction is now available as when students want it in the privacy of their residence or the browsing centers nearby.

It is evident that Internet is one of the most powerful tools for teachers to help students to collaborate, interact and participate actively in the learning process. We ought to make use of available resources in the Internet to improve the communicative skills of the non-native speakers. Native speakers widely use online portals for the updating in all areas of academic

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study. They not only concentrate on the grammar part of their language acquisition, but on expression, etymology of the language, games, alphabet games, fun cartoons, quiz, etc.

Video streaming technology helps in enhancing interactive portals through pronunciation video course materials which root out mispronunciation and improper expression and ensure perfection in the expression.

Teachers' Role Is Still Necessary!

It is still true that a teacher cannot be replaced by technology. But a teacher would always be constrained if her professional experience and training in mixing education with communication is not based on specific objectives in human e-learning concepts.

Web-based English Learning and Teaching around the World

Anyone who browses the Web immediately notices the availability of resources for English language learning and teaching. Internet is a virtual gold mine for educators. Never before have we had such inexpensive access to so many valuable resources—most of which are free. In addition to files, databases, libraries, there are many resources and projects designed for teachers and students. Broadcast outlets like BBC and CNN have their own English language portals and other business outlets do also maintain language portals.

It is more appropriate here to cite the names of a few portals of English language for better understanding and significance of Internet in imparting communicative skills of English for our students in India.

English Words Derived from Latin-Greek Origins (www.wordsources.info) - It focuses on derivatives of Latin and Greek prefixes, roots, and suffixes used in English vocabulary.

An Etymological Dictionary of Classical Mythology (www.library.oakland.edu) -It talks about English words' origins). Etymologically Speaking (List of some curious word origins.

Focusing on Words (vocabulary development and etymology) Martha Barnett's Funwords.com. (www.verbivore.com)

Online Etymological Dictionary (www.etymonline.com) - This is a map of the wheel-ruts of modern English.

Origin of Phrases (www.verbivore.com) - investigates how common phrases came to be.

The Word Detective (www.mcas.k12.in.us) - a master word sleuth tracks down word and phrase origins.

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The American Heritage Book of English Usage (www.librarything.com) - A Practical and Authoritative Guide to Contemporary English.

Apostrophe Protection Society (www.apostrophe.org.uk) – helps for the correct use of this currently much abused punctuation mark.

Common errors in English.Test Standard English grammar, usage, etc. (www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/commonerrorsinenglish.html) - tests of grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and style.

Gallery of "Misused" Quotation Marks (www.juvalamu.com/qmarks) – (They're quotation marks, and they turn up in the strangest of places).

The blue book of grammar and punctuation (www.grammarbook.com) - online reference guide and workbook.

Grammar Bytes! *(***www.chompchomp.com)** - An interactive grammar review with definitions and exercises.

Grammar Clinic Frame (www.verbivore.com) - an on-line grammar clinic forum discussion group from England.

Grammar and Usage for the Non-Expert (www.*grammartips.homestead.com)* - It addresses and solves common problems of grammar and usage for people who want answers but not a lot of technical explanations.

Grammar Slammer (www.englishplus.com) - Online Demo and Complete English Grammar Resource - the help file that goes beyond a grammar checker.

Punctuation Made Simple (www.punctuationmadesimple.com) - discussion of several of the most useful punctuation marks.

That's Right Words articles (www.rightwords.co.nz */ *www.theage.com.au*)* - grammar information and hints.

*World Wide Words (***www.worldwidewords.org/ www.listserv.linguistlist.org***)* -explores some of the byways of the English language.

Ask a Linguist (www.linguistlist.org) - a place where anyone interested in language or linguistics can ask a question and get the response of a panel of professional linguists.

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Linguistic Phenomena/Devices (www.site.uottawa.ca) - a list of some of the lesser known linguistic phenomena and devices used in English writing.

2Bee or Nottoobee (www.funbrain.com) – it helps the learners to find flowers by choosing the correct verb to complete the sentences.

Common Errors in English (www.wsu.edu:8080) – it helps the learners identify their mistakes

Good Grammar, Good Style (www.protrainco.com) - it offers features over 100 pages of useful articles and frequently asked questions for English learning.

Grammar Cat (www.grammar-cat.com) - it is an entertaining approach to English language grammar study. Examples and exercises for all levels are available.

Grammar Glamour library (www.thinkquest.org) – it offers an overview of the parts of speech and basic rules of grammar.

Grammar Lady Online (www.hus.parkingspa.com) – it offers many tips on correct language use and ways to have fun with language.

Guide to Grammar and Writing (www.edufind.com) - this site enhances the writing skills.

LEO: Literacy Education Online **(www.leo.stcloudstate.edu)** - provides scenario-based tutorials for better writing.

The Parts of Speech (www.essortment.com) - offers a short description of each of the eight parts of speech.

The Plural Girls (www.funbrain.com) - fun game teaches pluralization.

Rats (www.learningplanet.com) - game of adjectives and adverbs requires Shockwave plug-in.

Rules of English Grammar (www.essortment.com) - some important rules every writer should know.

Sentence Builder (www2.actden.com) - explores the parts that combine to form an effective sentence.

Stufun.com (www.stufun.com) - online tutorials and downloadable exercises are available

Grammar Gorillas (www.funbrain.com/grammar) - this is an interactive site, helps to polish up on the grammar skills

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Basic Grammar Skills (www.ruthvilmi.net/hut/help/grammar_help) -this site has an extensive list of different activities and basic grammar help. It includes interactive activities as well as definitions.

Grammar Quizzes On-line (www.webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quiz_list.htm) - this site has an extensive library of quizzes. There are 170 different grammar quizzes.

Help with Courses - Self-learning Environment

The above mentioned online resources certainly help the learners to impart better communicative skills. Moreover, course contents have been uploaded without much technical details of English. For instance, the blue book grammar and punctuation online reference guide and workbook (www.grammarbook.com) have explicit and simple explanation of the basics of grammar.

This portal is intended to teach basic grammar to the learners. It has many links like the following:

> Grammar Rules- Finding Subjects and Verbs, Subject and Verb Agreement, Pronouns, Who vs. Whom, Whoever vs. Whomever, That vs. Which, Adjectives and Adverbs, Problems with Prepositions, Effective Writing. Punctuation Rules-Spacing with Punctuation, Periods, Ellipsis Marks, Commas, Semicolons, Colons, Question Marks, Exclamation Points, Quotation Marks, Parentheses, Apostrophes, Hyphens, Dashes. Capitalization Rules – Capitalization, Commonly Confused Words- Spelling, Vocabulary, and Commonly Confused Words, Rules for writing numbers, etc.

The above stated Grammar book (www.grammarbook.com) course material has many hyperlinks. Thus, learners can easily navigate to hyperlinks and get more insight and clarification about the subject. This is the uniqueness of the online medium. Learners may limit their learning, or extensively continue their learning by browsing the internet.

All the online English language portals have many hyperlinks, those who are very keen to learn much about any particular subject they can do so. This self-learning environment can easily enhance the individual skills.

Indian Situation – Improving Our Accent

It has been well recognized at least for the last 150 years or so that Indians need more focused training in speaking skills in English. Our accent has been identified as a major problem of communication between us, the native speakers of English and those around the world who learn English as a second or foreign language.

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While there is nothing wrong to retain the beautiful and cute Indian accent, and every nationality will do so while they master English, we also need to communicate in such a way that our distinctive use of English in all levels – accent, lexical choice, sentence structure, discourse construction, formats of communication, etc., both at the spoken and written levels – will not impede comprehensibility and readability.

Our nation has chosen rightly to depend on teachers of English from within to teach millions of our children, adults, company executives, etc. As we wrote above, this was a deliberate choice even from the days of the East India Company, for many practical reasons. But the lack of native speakers of English as teachers of English to Indian students is not a drawback which cannot be remedied.

Internet comes very handy in this respect.

In a country like India we have to have interactive language portals to overcome the barriers in teaching. At least educational institutions ought to have interactive online English portals to build the language proficiency of the students. This will result in positive outcome in student performance and teacher preparation.

It is also our argument that the Indian software companies who make billions of rupees and dollars could do more to improve the availability of interactive materials throughout India.

The Need for Imparting Basic Computer Skills

Most of our schools are still located in rural areas, with several disadvantages as to the availability of educational resources. Active introduction and productive practice in operating computers and basic word processing software should begin as early as possible. In the next step, schools must be equipped with broadband facility. Teachers and students should be acquainted with accessing internet, using various search engines and in the processes of downloading materials, and operating voice programs. Next comes the introduction to available materials that would help improve the mastery of all the four language skills in English. There are also CDs available for the purpose which can also be used.

Make These a Part of the Curriculum and Syllabus

Using materials from the Internet should be made part of the language curriculum and syllabus. We would highly recommend allotting a specific number of marks for such activities.

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Mark Warschauer, and P. Fawn Whittaker. The Internet for English Teaching: Guidelines for Teachers. http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/markw

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