The Use of ICTs to Enhance Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Speaking is part of the language skills which is important for language learners to be developed. It is a crucial part of foreign language learning and teaching. In education, improving the speaking skills of students has always been a challenge. In the 21st century several new technologies are being introduced to teach speaking skills in the classroom. The use of technology has become an important part of the language learning process to achieve successful and better teaching outcomes.This paper focuses on the role of using new technologies in enhancing students' oral performance. It highlights the effectiveness and the positive outcomes of using ICTs to improve speaking skills which is primordial in English language learning. The paper emphasizes the tremendous role of ICTs in improving students' oral performance in and out of class. According to Means (1994), "the primary motivation for teachers to use technology in their classrooms is the belief that the technology will support superior forms of learning"[1]. Thus, teachers need to be aware of the merits of the effective use of ICTs. And, therefore, consideration needs to be given to develop ICT-based activities in oral classes, which enable students to learn and experience at the same time.

Keywords: *ICTs, use, enhancing speaking skills, outcomes*

1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have had significant impact on all features of our lives. In education, ICTs play crucial roles in facilitating teaching and learning. They have revolutionized the process of learning and language teaching. According to [1], the use of technologies has the great potential to change the existing language teaching methods. They transformed classroom communication methods and transformed instruction strategies.

2. Definition of ICTs

Information and Communication Technology/Technologies (ICTs) refers to all the technologies that permit to access, gather, manipulate and present or communicate information, these technologies could include hardwares such as computers and other devices and software applications and connectivity such as access to the internet, local networking infrastructure, video conferencing. [2]

According to [3] ICTs are a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information." These technologies include computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony. In the same vein, [4] define ICTs as a means of accessing, storing, sharing, processing, editing, choosing, presenting and communicating data through a selection of media in which it involves findings, sharing, and restricting data in its various forms. In this context, [5] stated that information communication technologies are electronic and computerized devices and associated human interactive materials in which we can apply in a range of teaching and learning processes.

3. The significance of using ICTs in teaching-learning

Several studies argue that the use of new technologies in the classroom is indispensable for giving opportunities for students to learn to function in an information age. It is obvious, as [6] maintained that traditional educational environments do not seem to be qualified for preparing learners to be productive in the workplaces of today's society. She claimed that organizations that do not integrate the use of new technologies in institutions cannot seriously claim to prepare their students for life in the twenty-first century. Similarly, [7] reported that "what is now known about learning provides important guidelines for uses of technology that can help students and teachers develop the competencies needed for the twenty-first century" (p. 206). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the use of ICTs in education can help improve memory retention, increase motivation and generally deepens understanding [8]. ICTs can also be used to promote collaborative learning, including role playing, group problem solving activities and articulated projects [9]. Thus, technology can effectively improve teaching and learning abilities, hence increasing learners' performances.

Some authors maintain that technology has the power to change the ways students learn and professors teach [10]. ICTs are recognized as catalysts for change; change in working conditions, handling and exchanging information, teaching methods, learning approaches, scientific research, and in accessing information. [11], recognise that technology-based teaching may not be essential in all classes but generally it is most facilitative as a result of providing relevant examples and demonstrations; changing the orientation of the classroom; preparing students for employment; increasing flexibility of delivery; increasing access; and satisfying public demands for efficiency. "The whole purpose of using technology in teaching is to give better value to students"[12]. These latter can access recent materials and can update their knowledge in order to enrich themselves as trend setters in the global market.

Making use of technology in university classrooms allows teachers to diversify their lectures, display more information, and enhance students' learning. Using different technologies in the classroom may also help teachers save time and energy and allow for more attention to be paid to the course content. Therefore, [13] states: "Technology has become a powerful catalyst in promoting learning, communications, and life skills for economic survival in today's world." According to [13], technology is a powerful tool with enormous potential for paving high-speed highways from outdated educational systems to systems capable of providing learning opportunities for all, to better serve the needs of 21st century work, communications, learning, and life. The innovations that ICTs has brought in teaching-learning process include: E-learning, e-communication, quick access to information, online student registration, online advertisement, reduced burden of keeping hardcopy, networking with resourceful persons, etc. Therefore, the presence of all these factors increased the chance of excellent integration of ICTs in teaching-learning process.

The integration of ICTs in the language teaching-learning environments is becoming a primordial step since the outcomes would be very productive. In this sense, [14] claims:

> The application of ICT gives more opportunities for communication between peer learners: they can exchange information in real time, they can participate in blog discussions, work in teams on different projects, exchange emails, search for information, etc. By using the authentic material provided by the Internet, we will have a better insight into the culture of the country and people whose language we study. (p.98)

4. Students' difficulties in speaking

Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and teachers have continued to teach speaking just as memorization of dialogues or a repetition of drills. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills as a way to help students express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. Speaking is part of the language skills which is important for language learners to be developed. Furthermore, According to [15] as foreign language learners, we should master speaking skill as our priority. Foreign language classrooms are the key for daily life setting in which language acquisition occurs. Thus, speaking is a crucial part of foreign language learning and teaching. In this context, Basavarajiah has stated that "speech is the ground work, all the rest are built up from it'. Yet, student's ability to speak depends not only on the classroom techniques, but also on other factors like motivation, adequate vocabulary and practice, and so on'. However, speaking represents a challenge to the majority of students. [16], speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. One of the main speaking challenges is learner's mistakes. Another challenge is the lack of motivation. Students are de-motivated and they pay less attention to the oral course because of many reasons that may include the repetition of uninteresting topics and activities as well as the use of traditional materials and techniques which need to be refreshed. Also, lack of practice is an other problem that most students encounter.

There are some studies which have investigated the speaking difficulties encountered by EFL learners. For instance, one study [17] examined Turkish EFL learners' communication obstacles in English language classrooms. It reported that anxiety and unwillingness during the English speaking process are considered two of the main obstacles for EFL learners. Anxiety and unwillingness are

caused by the fear of being negatively evaluated when making mistakes, particularly in front of their friends. This study also revealed that students who perceive their English as 'poor', feel more anxious and are more unwilling to communicate in English classes than the other students perceiving their English level as 'very good', 'good', and 'OK'. Unlike reading, writing or listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in foreign language in the classroom: worried about mistakes or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts. Accordingly, [18] also support this view and argue that asking the students to express themselves in front of the whole class is a common behavior of teachers in teaching speaking. However, they must know that this can result in the experience of stress for the students while they are doing speaking activities. [19] also confirmed that "it is easy for a foreign language classroom to create inhibition and anxiety." Furthermore, [20] asserts that all these factors can stop students from speaking confidently in front of their classmates. Therefore, he believes that the teacher must be alert to recognize them in the classroom.

5. The use of ICT to enhance speaking profeciency

As an essential means for communicating, speaking is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students in learning a foreign language. Improving the speaking skills of students has always been a concern. It has become vital for the person to be explanative, expressive and persuasive to excel in any profession they may persue. Speaking effectively receives a lot of input in the case of interviews, group discussions, presentations, meeting, seminars, workshop, and projects. So, to keep up with the fast developing 21st century, technology has to be introduced in speaking classes.

The concept of language learning has been revolutionized and according to [21]

> "Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill." "Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language – natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding." "In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful."

[22] wrote, "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language." Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be.

There are important tools that can be used to enhance and facilitate the learning /teaching process, especially speaking profeciency, such as :
Computers: are the most important tools of information and communication technology and backbone of modern human life. They are the most common ICTs tools used by most teachers. They are helpful in storing, collecting and preparing of data for communication.
Over head projector: is an effective tool of displaying information and processes to a large number of people simultaneously. Prepared forms of information are easy to display with the help of over head projector. Teachers can build strong relationship between their students and the equipment they are dealing with to make them use the language effectively and being good speakers. Visual aids are tools in presentation for the speaker because they give them something to refer to in order to preserve the act of interacting and make it more organized. Moreover, they give learners the opportunity to move around and use different gestures when they are presenting the work and they make the presenter more relaxed since they shift the eyes of audience from time to time to focus on the video aid so reducing the impression at the learner.
Digital camera: its usage presents endless chances for language profits and improvement across most of the subjects. It is very helpful tool to be used as a recorder of role playing or classroom presentations to be corrected later on by the teacher or even by the student him/herself as a kind of self-evaluation. That technique breaks the ice between the learner and the teacher and also it makes learners closer to technology.

The interactive board: provides the best to the students. For instance, the students can watch even the way the native speakers speak and they can learn a lot about communication, its process and proficiency outside the box. Visualizing the concepts by different persons with varying efficiency through ICT makes the students not only to know and learn the language, but also to practice it in their day to day life.

Social media: has become an important tool of communication. It provides a platform for sharing thoughts and ideas. Students can add themselves with the English language learning groups and take advantage of sharing information. Lots of social sites are available on it like, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. It is very helpful in learning situational language.

Online facilities for English language learning: A lot of online facilities are available on internet for the development language skills. Some of them are e-guidance, e-tutoring, e-teaching, e-journals, e-magazines, e-books, e-library, online training, virtual classes etc.

Pod casting: is the integration of audio files where they can feed their materials and play it inside and outside of the classroom. Podcasts can help the learner familiarize with the target language and teachers can use them as useful audio material that can be used in class for activities like discussions, besides, in the web, there are even particular podcasts that can include pronunciation for particular needs of students. These ways of learning have been observed to improve oral proficiency in students and make up for the lack of native speakers in the areas where students live.

Quicktionary is a pen-like device that permits the reader to easily scan the word and get its definition and translation on its own LCD screen.

Quick Link Pen which allows learners to copy and store printed text, Internet links. It helps to transfer the data to computers and enables the reader to get the meaning of the word from a built in dictionary.

Therefore, The use of technology has a great influence on learners' speaking ability inside as well as outside the classroom. On this basis, [23] described two different views about incorporating technology into the class. First, in the cognitive approach, learners get the opportunity to increase their exposure to language meaningfully and make their own knowledge. Second, in the social approach, learners must be given opportunities for authentic social interactions to practice real life skills.

6. Conclusion

Speaking plays a crucial role in teaching a foreign language. It is one of the most important skills to be enhanced and improved as a means of effective communication. So as to increase students' attention and motivation, teachers ought to create a smoothing classroom atmosphere. And bringing ICTs into practice has a major impact to facilitate and improve learning in general and speaking skills in particular. ICTs provide interaction between teachers and learners, provide comprehensible input and output, help learners to develop critical thinking skills, make learning and teaching become more student-centered, promote learners' autonomy and help them feel more confident, and increase learners' motivation to effectively learn a foreign language. As a conclusion, the use of ICTs in education has to be highly encouraged as the present students are the future generation who are going to mould themselves, their society, and the world as a whole. Thus, ICTs are viable tools for enhancing the teaching of foreign language speaking profeciency.

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