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USE OF ICT IN ENHANCEMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION SKILL: A STUDY

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Abstract

Reading is an essential literacy skill to enrich one's knowledge and update current scenario across the world. In spite of a lot techniques used by the teachers in a reading comprehension classroom, there is, still, a gap between the objective and achievement. There are many problems and obstacles in side of the teachers and the students in attaining their reading objective. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this current language education scenario can supplement certain innovative strategies to fill the gap. The present paper aims to study the use of ICT in enhancement of reading comprehension skill of the learners. Though there are a lot of ICT tools which can be used in language enrichment classroom, this paper specifically discusses the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in enhancement of reading comprehension.

Keywords

Reading comprehension, ICT, CALL, MALL

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Introduction

Reading is, basically, an important literacy skill. It helps the reader to accumulate knowledge and information. It gives opportunity for people to explore new ideas and concepts already exist, and it makes them think and create newer ideas and concepts.Many researchers on reading skill have found reading as a complex skill involving complex cognitive processes. It involves letter and word recognition and transfer of information from print to meaning. Reading, in general, is a complex activity, which involves both perception and thought. Though it is a complex skill having various problems to acquire, it is an essential and basic skill most people use in day-to-day life. Reading research spawns around more than two centuries.Every time, the teachers attempt to make use of various techniques to improve reading skill of the learners, but there a considerable gap between the objective and achievement.

As we are in the 21st century of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), we have a lot of opportunities to explore the ways to overcome the problems of reading comprehension skill using the available technologies. This paper studies the use of ICT in enhancement of reading comprehension skill of the ESL learners.

ICT in Indian Education

Over the past two decades, India's information and communication technology industry has been among the fastest growing in the world. In India, ICT is used in various fields like business, education, travel, agriculture, and so on. The role of ICT in education in India is immense. Recognizing the importance of technology, the National Policy on Education (1986) has stressed the need to employ education technology to improve quality education. There were two centrally sponsored schemes—Education Technology (ET) and Computer Literacy and Studies in Schools

(CLASS). This paved way for another centrally sponsored scheme—Information and Communication Technology at schools in 2004. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) has also highlighted the significant role of ICT in education.

The term ICT in Education has been defined in *National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in School Education*(2012):

> Information and Communication Technologies are defined as all devices, tools, content, resources, forums, and services, digital and those that can be converted into or delivered through digital forms, which can be deployed for realizing the goals of teaching learning, enhancing access to and reach of resources, building of capacities, as well management of the educational system.
>
> These will not only include hardware devices connected to computers, and software applications, but also interactive digital content, internet and other satellite communication devices, radio and television services, web based content repositories, interactive forums, learning management systems and management information systems.

There are various ICT tools used in the field of education to disseminate knowledge. They are radio, television, computers, mobile phones, internet, laptops, tablets, and so on. These ICT tools can be used in imparting education and training for teachers and learners. Radio has still been used by IGNOU. Rather than the use of traditional gadgets like radio and television, the modern gadgets like computers and mobile phones are more learner-centric instructional model.

ICT in Language Classroom

Many a time, the learners are passive in their traditional language classroom. The learners' active participation is essential in skill based classroom. In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift in English language curriculum. The learners' active participation is emphasized and the teachers act as facilitators. Inthe ICT based classroom, various ICT tools are supplemented; the teachers are facilitators; and the learners are active participants. ICT has the potential to remove the barriers that are causing the problems of low rate of learning in the language classroom. ICT as a tool can overcome the issues of disinterestedness, less number of teachers, and poor quality teaching learning process. N.Shalini Jayanthi and R.Vijayakumar (2016: 35) have emphasized:

> Now, we need the modern technologies for a better blended method of delivery to create apt teaching techniques to enhance the process of learning English language. ICTs are very motivating, because they help the learners to learn the language which is carefully designed to meet the prescribed goals.

The omnipresence of computer paved way for its use in the field of language teaching and learning. At the same time, it is to be noted that computer is not a new arrival in language classroom. It has been in use since 1960s. Since then there have been a lot of experiments and researches on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). CALL has nowadays become a common feature of most language classrooms.

With a wide range use of mobile phones on campus, many educational institutions have shifted to M-Learning (Mobile Learning) or Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) environment and they insist their students to possess feature-rich mobile phones with internet connectivity, which allows students and facilitators to do a wide range of assignments. The emergence of social networking such as blogs, wikis, facebook, twitter, whatsapp, as well as online repositories and websites such as YouTube, iTunes U and Big Think has been influencing a new trend through English has been widely used by the learners. The student use these applications and exchange their ideas in English and gradually they are able to practice and master it.

Moreover, as it has been discussed, ICT can really be used for better teacher and learning process and improvingthe quality of education. Researchers have also found that learners are, generally, able to remember 20% of what they see, 40% of what they hear and at the same time it is important to note that they are able to remember about 75% of what they see and hear simultaneously. The Government of India has declared 2010-2020 as a decade of innovation. In order to achieve innovation, reasoning and critical thinking are essential. Such capacity of reasoning and critical thinking is possible only if the youngsters or the learning generation aspire to do so. Their aspiration for higher achievement is possible through a wide range of reading habit. That reading will be worth when they read meaningfully. Language laboratories with the accessories like computers, headphones, CD ROMs, LCD Projectors, smart board, etc. play an immense role in language learning process. Such tools can be used in teaching and learning of all the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ICT can be a great use in enhancing reading comprehension skill of the learners, in order to achieve the aforesaid innovation.

ICT in Reading Comprehension

As it was discussed previously, there are a lot of ICT tools which can be use in language teaching. This paper discusses the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), specifically, in enhancement of reading comprehension.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Many researchers have stressed the importance of computers and the internet as sources in developing reading skills. The computer based reading improves the interaction between the students and the text. It also pays attention to individual needs and encourages independence while reading. The independency is left with the learners in terms of choice of the topic and the duration they take to read. They also evolve with self designed strategies to comprehend the text. Amir Marzban (2011: 3) points out:

> CALL by having an account of the significances of the communicative approach and its role in the establishment of an atmosphere in which learners learn the language through meaningful interaction and exchanging of genuine information can be a self-directed, self-assessing, and self-monitoring activity, in which the learner can take a more active role. In CALL, reading is read by a native speaker at a special speed which is appropriate for different levels of students, and it contains authentic real life purposes. One of the most

important aspects of using CALL in the classroom is that students are free from anxiety and there is no peer pressure which inhibits them from language learning easily.

It is also true that reading activities, in general, have been neglected. At times, they are conducted at the end of the class. Most of the time, in the traditional class environment, the learners would feel bored, and try to skip reading activities. On the other hand, reading comprehension classes can be made interesting and useful by showing pictures, short movies, slides, etc., on the screen, related to the text content. It creates interest among the learners and draws their attention towards reading. Such type of videos and multimedia materials give a clear view of the image creation in the minds of the learners. Consequently, understanding of the text materials becomes easy to the learners. These videos and multimedia materials are abundantly available in the internet. This type of teaching learning environment makes the learners more interactive as well as interesting.

There are a lot of activities and games in CALL which can be executed in reading classroom. During oral reading practice, it can promote speeded reading. In addition to reading skill, it enhances listening skill. During such activities, pronunciation, stress, and intonation skills are also enhanced. During silent reading practice, it can give deeper understanding of the text and develops creativity of the learners. Tariq Muhammad Bhatti (Aug. 2013: 5) discusses:

> CALL provided a self---paced and motivating language---learning environment in which the students worked with high level of interest at a faster pace. It was concluded that the use of computers can promote the effectiveness of reading material in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, use of words in different contexts, and comprehension. The computers assisted those students in solving queries and improving self---confidence at the high pace of their learning, which in turn, improved their motivation level and enhanced the quality and quantity of their outcomes.

Elradii (2013-2014: 32) quotes Al Udaini (2011) that the computer, by its attributes, can play an important and extensive role in improving the reading skills. In other words, the computer can be easily applied to the area of teaching and learning reading skills, due to its advantages, such as, free choice of tasks from a large quantity of texts and exercises, immediate feedback, visual clues and sound effects, random access, the 'Help' system, record-keeping, self-pacing or interactivity.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Due to the advent of mobile phones and a wide range of popularity among the people, it became inevitable in many fields. Previously mobile phones were strictly prohibited for the students on educational campuses. Gradually, nowadays, it has been occupying an important place in educational practice. Realizing the wide variety of use of mobile phones, many educational institutions insist their students to possess it for learning activities.MALL not only uses mobile phones for teaching and learning purpose, but also other handheld or easily portable devices with some form of wireless connectivity, such as tablets, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), etc.

Khubyari and Narafshan (2016: 59) presents the definitions of MALL: “Any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not in a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens

when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies."

MALL makes learning easy and interesting and creates fun rich environment. Similarly, MALL allows students to take part in their learning activity to have a better reading comprehension achievement. Mobile technology, nowadays, establishes a conducive environment to overcome many obstacles found in the current methods followed in the reading programme. Along with the CALL, MALL can also provide English language learners the same opportunities for independent and object oriented reading practice. It also provides immediate corrective measures and feedback as CALL.

Apart from CALL, MALL has many other uses. 'Any time; any where learning' is a popular slogan in MALL. Feature rich mobile like smart phones have a wide range use in reading comprehension. The learners use popular social networking apps like facebook, twitter, whatsapp, etc. for chatting among their near and dear ones. While they use these features on mobiles, they use English. They exchange their ideas and messages in English. They read and comprehend as quickly as possible and continuously for a long duration without boredom. Khubyari and Narafshan (2016: 59) deliberates:

> Smart phones haveturned into an everyday object for teenagers and many believe that these can be used tofacilitate the language learning process. The extended band-with as well as the possibility ofinstalling different apps on these smart phones has opened new opportunities for learners tobetter utilize these technologies for learning and comprehending different contents of language.Considering the limited number of MALL studies focusing on reading comprehension, thecurrent study tries to investigate the impact of using such devices on increasing the readingcomprehension of EFL learners.

There have been many researches and studies on MALL in reading comprehension and have proved that MALL has provided positive outcome and reinforcement in reading comprehension programmes . Kim (2014: 69) has quoted a study of personalized intelligent mobile learning system for English reading by Chen and Hsu (2008):

> The learners who were provided with English news articlesbased on their reading abilities together with unknown vocabulary of individual learnersshowed improvement in reading comprehension. The results of the study suggested thatm-learning system is very effective in enhancing reading comprehension and reading abilities ofthe learners.

Advantage of ICT in Reading Comprehension

There are multiple benefits and advantages in the use ICT in a reading comprehension classroom to both the teachers and the students.

1. Primarily it is an interesting mode activity for both the teachers and learners in a reading classroom.
2. Computers can present the text in a variety of ways apart from a plain printed one. The text can be accompanied by animation and sound which make both the text and reading more interesting
3. A variety of reading activities like guessing game, cloze test, rearranging the jumbled words or sentences according to the sequence of the events or process, etc., can be used.

4. The teacher acts as a facilitator and guide during the comprehension activity.
5. ICT encourages independency of the learners in terms of choice of text to be read and time taken to read. At the same time, teachers can easily monitor the learners during their activity individually and as a whole group.
6. It always supports learner centred learning activity. It encourages the learners to take part in reading activity and interactive with the text.
7. One of the most significant advantages of using CALL in the development of reading comprehension skills, often mentioned by many CALL specialists and teachers like Dangerfield, Kenning, Kitao, and Warschauer, is individualized instruction offered by the computer.
8. It is cost effective and time saving. Once the teacher sets the text and questions in a computer, it can be retrieved any number of time.
9. ICT helps in assessment of the learners' performance effectively and quickly. Any large size class can also be assessed quickly.
10. Teachers can also acquire feedback and save it in the device.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion made in this paper, it has been concluded that using ICT, particularly CALL and MALL in reading comprehension classroom increases the external motivation, willingness to learn, and affect positively on the achievement of the students' reading comprehension ability.CALL based reading programme brings an interactive session in the language classroom. MALL promotes learner autonomy and independency in the reading process in terms of content, place, and time.It establishes fun rich learning environment in reading classroom through various applications and game activities.ICT also helps the teachers to monitor the learner activities and give feedback on their assignments. However, there are certain drawbacks in the use of ICT. The animated visual features in ICT may sometimes distract the learners from their object of reading. During such situations the teachers are supposed to monitor and guide the learner through their objective. Otherwise, ICT is a helpful tool to both teachers and learner in a reading comprehension activity.

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