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The Effects of Technology on Learning Skills in EFL Learning Environment

Abstract

This study investigates effects of technology on learning skills in EFL learning environment (preparatory class), these effects require new instructional practices and approaches towards learning skills for better learning English as lingua franca with the aid of technology. In this regard, Computer-based technology provides an environment to benefit from learning skills amply and to enhance learning of English in EFL environment. Learning skills involve critical, creative, communication, and collaborating skills. In general, we employ communication skills in language learning process, in particular the other learning skills. In this study, communication skills were treated more than the others for better English language learning, for there is a correlation between communication skills and technology and it is apparent that technology enhances language learning. The study employs a qualitative approach for collecting data through a class observation. It aimed to find out positive effects of technology on learning skills for creating effective learning environment and its fruitful results related to English language teaching. Some of academic research indicates that communication skills improve language learning process with the aid of technology, that`s why, classrooms should be equipped with multi-media, internet, computer, and projector for smooth teaching and better command of language learning. The recent instructional practices such as method, techniques, approaches, design, and procedures were taken into consideration again due to effects of technology. Language learning was analyzed on the basis of technological effects on learning skills for obtaining the better command of English language.

This study provides some substantial evidences that partial distance learning has positive effects on effective learning of English language, for students feel free to learn more. This study also highlights some of the effects of technology on learning skills, especially, the communication skills are treated differently. It is advised to have computer-based and internet-based learning environments for positive outcome of teaching language. Therefore, it may be suggested that for the good and betterment of teachers and students, educational institutions should start to impart partial distance learning of English language classes for better command of language and might be conducive to long term academic achievement.

Keywords: *Technology; Learning Skills; Communication; Environment; Lingua Franca; Command; Effective; Computer-Based.*

1-Introduction

As time goes by, new instructional practices are replacing the old ones in learning environment, and learning a Lingua Franca becomes an arduous task in this process due to these new changes, and also the contribution of technology on learning skills is playing an important role that influences not only learners' attitude in a positive mode but also affects learners' approach towards this process positively as well in language learning process.

New methods as side effects of technologies, approaches, design and techniques stem from the side effects of technology and the implementations of those instructional practices and also teaching a foreign language become challenging in terms of technological developments. Improving learning skills of the students are becoming easier with the aid of technology and the learning environment is in need of having being equipped with the technology for better and fruitful teaching of a foreign language.

Language learning takes place in a natural laboratory (classroom) and learning skills of the learners make better the language learning. Learning means increasing the capacity for better performance. For that reason, technology is needed for this process and makes it work smoothly. Learning skills involve critical thinking, creative thinking, communication and collaborating. In language learning process, all of them are partially needed, but communication skill is needed continuously for teaching well. And not only students but also teachers are needed those skills, for the teachers cannot manage the learning process without them too. Actually, effective teaching requires enthusiasm and creativity, to have this continuously; technology becomes an indispensible tool for the teacher and makes the learning process fruitful and enjoyable. If language learners are enthusiastic and interested for learning then they like to communicate with others. Language learning can improve through communication; in this regard computer technology provides an environment for better language learning. No one can deny the advantages of technology and how it creates viable atmosphere for easy and enjoyable learning in this natural laboratory.

Today, it is observed that interactive approach improve learning skills of the students too much, for technology provides that congenial atmosphere for effective outcome. It is needed to equip the classroom environment with technology to improve those skills of the students. Thus, it creates an environment for interactive teaching. Teachers know that students demonstrate positive approach for using technology, for it provides them many facilities in learning process. In fact, technology increases the interest and the motivation of the students for learning with better applied learning skills with the aid of learning skills.

In EFL classrooms, motivation, interest, self-responsibility and communication are must for the better application of learning skills. Internet-based and computer-based technological classrooms give opportunity to learners related to many real life situations in which there is an interactive learning through cooperative method. Technology offers attractive and interesting facilities for learning language, it

encourages students for personal learning and increases interest and enthusiasm for better communication in learning. Computer technology provides and enriches an environment for reading, writing, listening and speaking and also supplies different types of films for real life communication. These beneficial and useful sources with the aid of computer definitely motivate students and create an interactive learning environment for teaching/learning. Many researches demonstrate that cooperative approach improves learning skills especially communication skills in learning process, for computer-based technology provides this facility. To do effective teaching in language learning process, distance teaching can make language learning easier in EFL programs. In the classroom, students cannot feel free to speak but when they are handling with their PC and they can pay attention to their learning. So, to improve learning skills of the students, partial distance learning can provide effective learning environment with the aid of technology thorough internet and computer-based materials.

Through this study, it is aimed to understand the effects of technology on learning skills of students in EFL classrooms in language learning process and to offer partial distance learning as an instructional practice to motivate students for effective learning.

2-Literature

There are four types of learning skills, they are called as the 4C`s. The skills are creative, critical, communication, and collaborating. They are indispensible and necessary for improving students learning in learning environment. As I observe there is a theoretical and practical link among learning skills, so I will do my best to relate. First of I will attempt to demonstrate the relation and combination of communication and collaboration skills and critical and creative skills and then the combination of all of them in learning process. One important point I should mention here is that communication and collaboration skills are necessary for primary and secondary education but critical and creative skills are needed for higher education (National Education Association, 2010).

3-Creativity

Creative thinking is a way of discovering possibilities, unlimited, extensive inventions or talking about the activities of right hemisphere of the brain. It is ability to invent something and to imagine something. To be creative, it is necessary to originate new ideas and find a way to replace, combine or change the existent ideas. Everyone has creative ability and creativity of the children surprises us too much. Maybe, wrong educational practices limit this ability. Creativity means to demonstrate attitude to newness, ideas, possibilities and being flexible to changes. Creative person always thinks that there is a place for other possibilities. When you speak about tea with milk then a creative person might say; why not? There is no tea with honey, tea with lemon or tea with salt (Robinson, 2011).

Creativity requires that there is always better of everything, so continuous hard work, alterations and improvement of ideas are needed for reaching real truth. That`s why, inventors always demonstrate continual perseverance and patience to

make a little better than before. As a result, creativity needs a process for the better of everything. There are various creative abilities such as; imagining, brainstorming, creating, designing, questioning, problem solving, improvising, innovating, and overturning (Robinson, 2011).

4-Critical thinking

It is the activity of left hemisphere in the brain; it is related to better understanding of something through careful and focused analysis. It helps for the development of intellectual traits. There are various types of critical thinking skills such as; defining, describing, explaining, comparing & contrasting, classifying, arguing, problem solving, analyzing, evaluating, and tracking cause & effect. It is the ability of reflective and independent thinking; it is the way to infer consequences from what you know and to benefit from the information to find out solution for problems. Critical thinking provides an environment for improving theories, obtaining knowledge, and strengthening arguments. There is a correlation between critical thinking and creativity, because it necessary to have critical thinking for assessment, evaluation, and develop creative ideas (Lai, 2011 & Coughlan, 2007-08).

5-Communicating skills

It is the ability to transfer of thought from a person to another and take in thought from another person. Communication creates an environment to be in line with each other and thinking together. To get in touch with somebody, communication is playing a significant role through various ways and skills. It involves skills such as; reading, writing, speaking, listening, turn taking, using technology, following conventions, choosing a medium, analyzing the situation, and evaluating the messages. It has a correlation with language teaching, for communication skills create the better environment for learning language easily (National Education Association, 2010).

6-Collaborating skills

When there is a common target to do together with somebody, collaborating starts. As new things replace the old ones and the effects of technology create various alternatives and sources then collaboration is needed more than ever before. It involves such skills; goal setting, leading, delegating, managing time, brain storming, resolving conflicts, allocating resources, decision making, and evaluating (Conley, 2011).

7-Methodology

In this study, methodology is based on non-instructional class observation through qualitative approach. With aid of critical thinking, it is aimed to discover the effects of technology on learning skills in ELF environment and to identify and clarify what seems effective and ineffective in technology use and their relations with language teaching in terms of learning skills. It is also aimed to find out possibilities and alternatives in technology use in language teaching and make use of technology as productive as possible for fruitful and enjoyable teaching of language in EFL environment. In this study, communication skills are treated more for the good of language learning and these skills are taken into consideration differently.

8- Analysis

Language teachers need to consider the learning skills they are using while teaching English and beforehand also they need to know strengths and weaknesses of each skill through which they will be able to enhance for better command of English language, especially that is considered for long-term success. Herein, keeping in mind the positive contribution of inborn skill of each student, teachers aim to benefit from those hidden skills in order to bring a positive attitude to class. In practice, they try to use the existing gift of the students to its full capacity with the help of learning skills. Also, teachers never forget that learning skills are useful if learning goals and learning environment are known well, since existing facilities like technology provides flexibility, adaptability for cooperative learning, and also it improves development of skills and participation of the students.

Teachers need to find ways how to develop skill development and class participation. Therefore, they try to create a congenial atmosphere in the classroom, which provides successful relationship with students and personal communication style with each student as well. Keeping in mind each student exhibits different reaction to different challenges, teachers develop numerous ways of communication skills; especially they consider constructive communication skills in language learning. In the classroom, face to face communication appears very useful to make students more aware of their own learning skills and to some extent this type of communication provides better class participation. In case, teachers feel insufficiency in face to face communication with students, they might implement on-line communication skills with the help of internet, social media, and etc.

Even though on-line communication has its limitations such as; internet is a virtual environment that might cause misunderstanding, miscommunication, and devoid of emotions while communicating with students. In language learning process, teachers need to use both face to face communication and on-line communication skills through which they can get in touch/keep in touch with their respective students and step by step they would be aware of students' needs and expectations. How much and how well the teachers know needs/ expectations of the students, then they develop constructive and informative strategies to satisfy those needs/expectations of the students and also accordingly the teachers are able to find out students' values and preferences and vice versa. If both sides (teacher/students) know each other, then the learning becomes more collaborative for the good of the teaching and learning. The collaborative approach makes students get involved in learning better and creates constructive communication among them.

Thus, creating a congenial atmosphere can also be possible with the help of collaborative approach, so that participation of the students can increase and transferring of knowledge can be easier than before. More than that, collaborative approach makes ways for improving learning skills of the students, since the students find that atmosphere appropriate for showing their learning preferences and the students find positive ways for constructive communication.

Due to constructive communication and collaboration skills in the classroom, the student do their best for better learning language.

Collaborative communication increases enthusiasms and creativity of the students, since the student feel better in this atmosphere and share their views openly in communication overall. Openness triggers enthusiasm and vice versa, so that students share views and find the language learning very meaningful. Openness not only makes appropriate communication but also makes the students develop learning skills. Moreover, openness not only supports positive communication but also makes students express their feeling and emotions. Herein, the teachers try to recognize the students' learning skills with the aid of face to face communication. If the teachers cannot get in touch with some student in face to face communication, they might use internet technology. Because some students might be shy and cannot have appropriate communication in the class. Teachers need to know that the classroom environment looks like a miniature of the society. Also, the students are inclined to use the language they are learning and in near future, the respective students. Collaborative communication also makes ways for student-centered learning environment. To make students very active and get involved in the learning materials the internet plays a very important role. Today, schools have the internet, which opens ways for researching easier, and it is under our fingertips without killing time, and also helping find all necessary information for the good of the lesson.

Communication and collaboration skills are playing important roles in the future professional lives of the students. It is evidently known that those skills always require interactions with people for acquiring knowledge and information. Therefore, improving these learning skills open the horizons of the students for better interactions with people while learning a language. Actually, language itself creates an environment for fruitful communication and collaboration with other people during the whole life. Thus, students can express themselves to others and understand the others and of course vice versa. Because of rapid technological developments, this means the students have to master a self-learning and a set of lifelong learning skills in order to meet the demands of their future professional lives. (Dong. W, November 2004). So far, many researches demonstrate that student-centered teaching that stipulates communication and collaboration skills promote lifelong learning skills. For lifelong learning skills, it is significant to teach a man fishing, not to give him a fish. It is aimed to feed the man for a lifetime, actually not to feed him for a day. For that reason, 'Fish' and 'fishing' are metaphors for 'knowledge' and 'lifelong learning skills' respectively. (Dong. W, November 2004. Lifelong learning skills start learning/teaching environments provided that there are constructive communication and collaboration. Both skills become requirements of long-term learning and considered a must for meeting the demands of technological developments.

Teachers benefit from the internet in order creates a useful and easy way for any relevant activities. In case the teachers might send home assignments or required information the students missed during the classes. Schools provide ample technology in the classroom through which the teachers makes their teaching easier and students' learning fruitful.

Actually, in language learning, technology has the potential to present relevant materials concerning better communication. Also, technology offers students to take notes and download required materials easily. At the same time, the negative effects of technology are needed to be considered in details. Also, the addictions of the social media makes the students uninterested and even during the lesson students are busy handling with their social media network accounts and also they are not aware how they are killing their time. They are planning to check their mails in a second but they cannot realize how time flies away like the wind. On the other hand, the Internet provides a scope for many students to escape their reality and therefore they are physically inside the class but mentally they are outside the class. Moreover, internet appears uncontrollable for many students. That's why; the researcher considers "laptop & smart phone banned" lessons and "laptop & smart phone permitted" lessons for positive outcomes. Today, in educational institutions, the teachers are tired of not only social media networks that cause to students' poor grades, but aslo most of the students are showing less motivation towards lessons and even they cut the classes without any real reason. The class atmosphere looks like such as; teacher is talking and listening to himself not the students (Coşkun & Özturk, 2013).

Above all, teachers are aware of the problem, but they need to have a constructive balance between a how/why to use social Medias and how/why to do homework with the help of appropriate planning. As it is clear that the negative and positive effects of technology in teaching/learning environments are available in educational institutions, maybe the teacher think over approaches for beneficial use of technology. Mainly, teachers need to focus on how to improve students' learning skills in language learning through technology, for that reason teachers consider giving technology related home assignments in order to benefit from the technology and also teachers need to find ways for improving creativity, critical thinking and communication with the help of existing technology. Creative thinking opens the ways for possible and unexpected discoveries and gives possible opportunities for new inventions of cognitive skills.

Through technology, the students are able to have access to new creative materials concerning language learning and those kinds of documents are presented for any use of the students around the world in the webpages in the Internet. In case the teachers are struggling for finding relevant materials for language learning activities, they con channelize the students for using creative language learning materials. Actually, those materials are known as newness, new ways/possibilities of improving language and they are available more than expected. Creatively done materials are offering facilities to teachers and students, and they reach those materials without any difficulty, since they are under just their fingertips with the help of internet. Those materials consist of illustrations, maps, flash cards, real life communications etc. Maybe teachers cannot provide all of them, but technology appears a virtual friend for overcoming those issues in learning language. Language learning will be easy, if technology is used properly. But teachers need to find out alternative ways through critical thinking.

It is associated with cognitive skills; therefore teachers need to consider careful and focused analysis. Critical thinking involves defining, describing, explaining, comparing, and arguing.

These are necessary for language teachers for useful communication in language learning, since communication includes various descriptions, explanations, definitions etc. So that students will show inclination in language learning and it will be possible to find out students' hidden skills through the activities of critical thinking that opens ways for better communication.

Communicative skills offer many opportunities to language learning; since it creates a scope of sharing is caring for the good of both sides. Whenever there is communication, both sides are inclined to be in line with each other and thinking together.

Communicative skills involve reading, writing, speaking, listening, which are easier and available offered by technology. For that reason, technology presents access for teachers and students in terms of proper communication with many students who want to learn various languages. But creating an ethos that makes ways for collaboration with students might be a good option, since step by step the collaboration will make a fruitful student centered lesson.

Actually, students collaborate with each other, whenever there is a common target working together and getting benefit together mutually. Herein, the researcher focuses on collaborating with the aid of technology for learning a particular language, for technology create various alternatives and sources, which entail critical thinking, creativity, communication etc.

For that reason, today teachers give more importance to technology-based activities in the classroom and give technology-based home tasks through which the students improve their learning skills and step by step they gain self-confidence for better command of the particular language. Self-confidence opens ways for doing the activities enthusiastically that causes fruitful outcomes in a particular language learning.

As we notice the negative and positive effects of technology in teaching/learning environments, it is better to consider Haward Gardner `s multiple intelligence approaches for beneficial use of technology. It is also essential to consider effects of technology on learning skills, and technology related home tasks and activities should be taken into consideration to observe effects of technology in this regard.

9- Conclusion

It is clear that technology comes with its positive and negative effects; we observe its overall effects in teaching/learning as well. As a result, the learning skills are affected from technology in this respect. To have a successful and productive life in the future, it is better to learn learning skills, for students cannot be a useful part of the community without those skills. Therefore, teachers are playing significant role to develop these skills of the students. So, teachers should use technology-based activities in the classroom and give technology-based home tasks to equip the students with promising learning skills for better future. Beyond classroom activities, teachers should focus on skills-based knowledge, and give more home tasks as part of the lecture to consider it as partial distance learning, for some students can hide their aptitude in the classroom. Developments of learning

skills do not just depend on class activities, because life-long learning is possible if students take responsibility in their learning. Computer-based technology helps students enormously, if home tasks are given as partial distance learning activity under control of the teachers.

Many researches demonstrate that in primary and secondary education, students are learning communicative and collaborative skills, but in higher education students are learning critical and creative skills. For that reason, before higher education, teachers should help students gain communicative and collaborative skills within the classroom. If students are good at these two skills, they become successful in critical and creative thinking. In fact, language accelerates gaining of the learning skills. Language teaching is the best environment and opportunity for teachers to teach these skills for better and useful citizens for community in the future. Students need to express themselves, so they gain this power through self-confidence.

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