

Technology Assimilation and Continuous Evaluation Process in English Language Teaching

Shalini Vohra

Assistant Professor, Affiliated Organization: University of Petroleum & Energy Studies, Dehradun, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

Language is an instrument of expression and communication. Though English is taught as a Second language in our country, it is seen as a preferred academic language by both teachers and students alike. Around the world English Language Teachers especially Teachers of English as a Second Language have been using technology resources in their classroom. The main objective behind any innovation in technology is to ensure that it provides comfort, leisure, productivity and a better quality of life. Nobody can deny that technology has revolutionized education. In this age of rapid pensiveness there is one thing that is certain that teachers have to keep pace with the new methods and technology with the modern technology development. Evaluations of technology integration in classrooms have led to a conclusion that technology integration is not about the technology, it is about teaching and learning. A digital language laboratory is a network of computers with appropriate software that provides the functions of the language laboratory along with the integration of video, word-processing and other computer applications. Rapid advances in information and communication technology have created exceptional opportunities in the field of education and have had a reflective effect on the way teachers teach and how learners learn. The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of a digital language laboratory along with instructional material developers & Continuous evaluation process for developing effecting LSRW skills among students.

KEYWORDS: Continuous Evaluation Process, Digital Language Laboratory, Instructional material, Teaching of English in India

Language is the tool of expression and communication. Although English is taught as a Second language in our country, it is seen as a preferred academic language by both parents and students alike. Today, most schools are opting for English as a medium of instruction, as English is seen as a language for social mobility. Teaching of English has undergone a lot transitions and today there are numerous approaches to tackle the teaching of English. Teachers are trying to develop a support system that could help in transacting the English Curriculum with ease. Technology assimilation added value to the teaching.

Teaching of English and NCF 2005

The NCF 2005 talks of a curriculum framework that enables schools and teachers to make choices and move towards greater autonomy. Such a movement towards school

autonomy is seen in a positive light by all major policy and curriculum documents. A national curriculum can aim for a cohesive curricular policy based on guiding principles for language teaching and acquisition, which allows for a variety of implementations suitable to local needs and resources, and which provide illustrative models for use. Input rich communicational environments are a prerequisite for language learning. Inputs include textbooks, learner-chosen texts, and class libraries allowing for a variety of genres: print; parallel books and materials in more than one language; media support; and authentic materials. The aim should be to identify delivery systems for comprehensible inputs to the child, whether in the classroom or outside it; for example, the school can serve as a community resource centre for children after school hours. Research has shown us that greater gains accrue when language instruction moves away from the traditional approach of learning definitions of words (the dictionary approach) to an enriched approach, which encourages associations with other words and contexts (Fawcett and Nicolson, 1991). Materials used or available as texts in class libraries may be in print as well as multi-media formats. Children must be exposed to a whole range of genres.

In addition to squarely contextualizing the educational processes, the production of teaching learning material package at local levels will also increase avenues for teacher participation at a hitherto unprecedented large scale. This should significantly enhance the quality of local level educational discourse, and is likely to improve upon the ownership of material and methods by the teachers. Each school or teacher should be able to choose the package of her liking, given that she is committed to achieve the required learning levels and all available packages are of proven quality. Freedom to choose methods and materials is likely to enhance the teacher's self image and responsibility.

Technological Options in an English Language Classroom

Around the world English Language Teachers especially Teachers of English as a Second Language have been using technology resources in their classroom. Listed below are various technological options that can be used in the language classroom.

- **Radio:** The radio is a low cost teaching aid in the language classroom. It can be used for listening comprehension activities and also help students to improve their own speech and intonation patterns. Radio changed the face of the distance language learning classroom. The basic disadvantage of the radio programs are timing issues, inability to replay and the fact that it caters to a larger audience, but not a local audience.
- **Television:** In the language classroom, television is capable of bringing out the essence of communication. Communication concerns itself not only with verbal expressions but also non verbal cues and gestures. Students can see, learn and reproduce these communication patterns in their behavior. The major problem with using a television as a teaching learning tool in the language classroom, is that it is expensive to make programs for the television that cater to the local needs.
- **Tape Recorder:** has had probably the single greatest impact on language learning. Its introduction meant that the teacher could play recordings of authentic native speech. This device has two options that make it useful in the

language classroom. One, it can replay programs over and again and second it can help students record their own language usage. When students are able to record and listen to their own language usage, they can learn language more effectively.

□ **VCR: (Video Cassette Recorder):** The video cassette recorder was an expensive option, in the language classroom. But, it was capable of playing, replaying and recording situations that could be used as input in the language classroom. Like, the television, language was in totality meaning apart from verbal dimension, the non verbal dimension was also learnt by the language learner.

□ **CD / DVD Player:** Like the VCR and the Tape, the CD/ DVD Player allows the teacher in the language classroom, to integrate, authentic language samples from native speakers. The only advantage is that the output using a CD/ DVD player is clearer as compared to a Tape player. Also, the CD and DVD have longer shelf life as compared to the cassettes or tapes.

□ **Computer:** The computer revolutionarized the language classroom. A single machine was capable of creating, editing, sharing, recording and storing language samples in both audio and video format that could be retrieved at any place and anytime with the Internet connection.

Continuous Evaluation Process:

Continuous evaluation process provides students a continual brook of opportunities which help weak students to start the next level even they have not performed well in the previous section. Advanced students can progress through material at their own pace and remain engaged by pursuing more challenging work. In this process students themselves understands that in which skill more potential is required. Through continuous evaluation process their self-awareness increased and they come to understand their proficiencies and knowledge gaps. . Overall objective of implementing this process is to equip the student to converse in English with ease and build confidence in their professional and personal life Assimilating the grammatical, lexical structures and phonetics. It alsoexposes the students to a variety of self - instructional, learner-friendly and totally inter-active modes of language learning. Evaluation pattern is based on various parameters which includes several LSRW skills with dossier activity.

Sr.No.	Evaluation Pattern	Parameters	MM
1.	Continuous Evaluation 1	Listening Skills	100
2.	Continuous Evaluation 2	Speaking Skills	100
3.	Continuous Evaluation 3	Reading Skills	100

4.	Continuous Evaluation 4	Writing Skills	100
5.	Continuous Evaluation 5	Grammar/Vocabulary	100
6.	Continuous Evaluation 6	VideoShoot (Personal Interview)	100

Language Laboratory

The language laboratory is an audio or audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching. They can be found, amongst other places, in schools, universities and academies.

Functions of the Language Laboratory

The language laboratory can serve the following functions:

1. **The Aural Objective:** The language laboratory can provide samples native speakers of the language to be learnt. These samples can be played repeatedly and can help the learner gain an understanding towards the tone, intonation pattern and stress while speaking the language.
2. **The Oral Objective:** The language laboratory with its various tools can help the learner record sample of her voice and replay it again to either identify errors or monitor progress.
3. **The Grammar Objective:** The language laboratory is useful in teaching grammar as it is in instilling good pronunciation habits. It copes with two of the major problems of grammar instruction: the need for more exercise material than the instructor usually has available, and the need for a transition from a theoretical mastery of a grammar point to an ability to apply the point orally with ease. The student who gets an opportunity to learn grammatical concepts in this manner, is assimilating grammar without passing through the well known cycle of remembering the rule, applying it as though on paper, and then trying to stammer it out orally.
4. **The Remedial Function:** Most language teachers feel the existence in the classroom is a constant struggle between the needs of the class as group and those individuals who make up the group. The language laboratory can function as a remedial education centre for students who take time in learning and those who require more practice sessions.
5. **The Evaluation Function:** Testing of English in majority of the classroom situations is in the form of paper pencil test. The language laboratory can be exploited to evaluate a learner's progress in the aural, oral, writing and reading dimension of the language. This adds to the authenticity of learning experience.

Foreign language learning lends itself naturally to the use of media. Linguists stress the primacy of speech over writing in language: children can listen and speak before they learn to read and write and all languages of the world are spoken, but not all have a writing system. Accordingly, foreign-language educators have been heavily involved in the use of audio equipment. They welcomed the first audio device, the phonograph, and have immediately adopted other advances in audio technology such as magnetic tape and

digital media. (Delcoque, Annan, & Bramoullé, 2000). The language laboratories flourished during the 1960s, with the changing methodologies in the teaching learning process and the decline of behaviourism, language laboratories began a period of decline. With the technological boom in the horizon, the Teachers of English as a Second Language, began exploiting the computer as a tool in the English Classroom. The computer, has the distinct advantage of being a single machine capable of *creating, sharing, editing and saving* language projects, assignments, lessons and modules in the language classroom.

Digital Language Laboratory

A digital language laboratory is a network of computers (or even stand alone computers) with appropriate software that provides the functions of the language laboratory along with the integration of video, word-processing and other computer applications.

Dedicated digital laboratories can provide:

- Versatility:** Texts, images, audio and video can easily be integrated, and the teacher can remodel and tailor-make the materials to fit the needs of different language learners.
- Ease of movement between different applications:** like a word-processor, a presentation software, the internet or a computer assisted language learning module.
- Interactivity:** the computer can help students learn at their own pace, allow them to choose the activities they wish to do and essential record, edit and share their own voice samples or writing samples with others.
- Teacher intervention:** The teacher can not only intervene in the language learning process of the students, but also keep track of the learning curve of the language learner.
- Self Learning:** is made possible, as the material in the digital laboratory can be transferred easily as most students today own a PC themselves. This allows students to learn at their own pace and sometimes repeat the lessons after the lab hours.

Setting up a Digital Language Laboratory

In principle a digital language laboratory can be set up in the computer laboratory of the school, in the computers that are multimedia enabled. Multimedia enabled computers can play, record and share audio and video files that can be seen and heard by the language learner. Table 1 describes the Digital Language Laboratory Component (Hardware and Software) and the Language Skills in Learning a Language.

Table 1: The Digital Language Laboratory and the Language Skills in Learning a Language.

Language Skill	Hardware Component	Software Option
Aural Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Speakers: for a larger audience <input type="checkbox"/> Headphone: for a single user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Media Player that comes with the operating System (for example Windows Media Player in the Windows OS, Songbird in Ubuntu)
Oral Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Microphone: to record oral speech sample <input type="checkbox"/> Headphone or Speakers: to hear the recorded samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Audacity or any Sound Recording Software that comes with the operating system. Such software also allow editing the recorded sample

Writing Skill	<input type="checkbox"/> Key board: to type data <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor: to view the typed data <input type="checkbox"/> Memory Disk: to save and transfer the data <input type="checkbox"/> Printer: to print the data	<input type="checkbox"/> Word Processing Software like MS Word, Open Office Writer etc can help language students record their writing samples in the language they are learning <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Publishing Software like MS Publisher, Scribus for Linux etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation Software like MS PowerPoint or Open Office Impress, to make Presentations on content areas.
Reading Skill	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor: to view the samples <input type="checkbox"/> Printer: to take print-outs of the sample	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading comprehension activities can be conducted using the Internet Browser, where the students can read the passage and then attempt to answer questions based on that.

Communication in the Second Language involves the four skills mentioned above. While learning a second language like English, it is important that the learner is not only exposed to four skills separately but also as a whole. It is here where the digital language laboratory can provide maximum benefit.

Teachers as Material Developers in the Digital Language Laboratory

An ongoing debate in the arena of Materials in English Language Teaching is, whether, English Language Teachers should use published materials or develop their own *tailor-made* materials. Published materials (or commercially available materials) originate from and are written for particular situations and learners; thus, it is impossible to have “all-embracing” textbooks or software, as those published materials often claim, ready for use in all English Language Teaching situations. Second, since published materials aim for a large and largely unknown readership, they don’t take into account the level of English proficiency and expert knowledge of any particular group of learners. Consequently, even if the linguistic level of the materials is appropriate for a given group, they may still either become bored with the content they already know or feel helpless with the totally unfamiliar content. Also, most published textbooks or software are not based on empirical research or theoretical work. They fail to provide the rationale underlying the approach to language learning they propose or to explain how the particular language items were selected. Furthermore, published materials, for the purpose of appealing to a large market, do not consider the appropriateness for classroom use in a local learning situation. In other words, they may lack cultural and social appropriacy. In spite of general opposition to published materials (Jones, 1990; Robinson, 1988); Swales (1980) reminds us that published materials have their potential virtues, and “a reconsideration of the role and structure of ESP textbooks would allow them a restricted but legitimate place. . . .” In his opinion, published textbooks have a clearly discernible shape which can create predictability for the students about the course plan and content. Besides, a greater degree of internal coherence can be expected from published textbooks than from teacher-generated materials, especially if the latter are developed hastily under time pressure. In addition, Swales (1980) indicates that it is not cost-effective for each institution to produce its own tailor-made materials. Sheldon (1988) also explains why

some English Language teachers use published materials. Teacher generated materials often have less credibility than published materials, especially under the pressure of heavy timetables and the highly restrictive nature of most teaching situations. Sheldon (1988) goes on to talk about the 'cruel paradox' that students often prefer slickly produced commercial course books *or software* to materials made by teachers themselves. The argument here seems to be that teacher developed materials will seem ragged and unprofessional next to those produced by professionals.

Block (1991) states three reasons why English Language teachers should replace the commercial course books with a contribution of their own:

1. *Contextualization*: Contextualization with real examples which are of real interest to the learners will make them active participants in the process of language learning.
2. *Timeliness*: Commercially available textbooks are revised after a long duration due to various economic factors.
3. *The Personal Touch*: Block (1991) has found students appreciating teachers who prepare their classes and materials that give a clear tangible evidence of preparation.

Block (1991) presents a six phase process, to help teachers prepare teaching material for English Language Teaching:

- Phase 1*: The teacher finds an interesting article in a news magazine.
- Phase 2*: The teacher spends over an hour putting together a reading exercise, a language activity derived from the text, and a discussion activity.
- Phase 3*: The teacher uses the text and activities in class, and then makes a few adjustments in the activities.
- Phase 4*: The teacher posts several copies of the text with the activities on a board in the teachers' room.
- Phase 5*: Several -teachers use the text and activities in their classes.
- Phase 6*: At some point, the text and activities are either put in a long-term bank (in which case, they are considered to be relatively 'timeless') or thrown away

Davies (2002) states that the use of teacher generated materials is important, because whilst learners may wish for more cultural content, they do not always want to deal with the kind of '*issue-based*' topics which typify many course books, preferring instead to experience their culture in more accessible ways.

In view of the above arguments, teachers can become material developers to suit their local classroom needs. They can use the following software options to create material for their English Classroom.

- Hot Potatoes**: Hot Potatoes is a program that you can use to create cloze exercises, crossword puzzles, multiple choice, matching, and mixed form activities. Research (Chapelle, 2001; Ellis, 2005) points to the need for providing English Language Learners with opportunities for language input, making language salient and focusing on form. Through the use of Hot Potatoes English Language Learners can work with language they understand while creating and using quizzes, games and activities to make the language real for them.
- MS PowerPoint or Open Office Impress**: This presentation software can help the teacher create interesting content rich teaching aids or interactive games.

□ **Movie Maker Software:** This software can help the teachers of English, develop their own videos, that they could use in their English Classroom to help students learn the language.

□ **Audacity:** This software can help the teacher create, record, edit and share language samples; to teach the students correct pronunciation and intonation patterns in English.

Using the digital laboratory has another distinct advantage for the English language teachers, as they can share and store all their work in formats that can be transferred easily from one computer to another. Secondly, the teachers with a little bit of training can develop material to suit their local needs. These materials could provide remedial education to the learner; it could provide instant feedback and reinforcement to the learner so that learning English is an interesting process.

Lab Dossier Activities

Students love innovative ideas. It helps to enable the students to apply the basic language skills(LSRW) learnt so far in the language lab through various exercises. Through various LDAs

Students learn the techniques of acquainting and engaging themselves in conversation with strangers. They also learn how to make a conversation interesting and overcome the fear of formal speech by providing them an opportunity to assess themselves through recording. There are certain group activities like story binders, interview preparation which helps to inculcate the importance of being preplanned and prepared before conducting an assignment.

Some considerations...

Although the traditional concept of a language laboratory may be questioned, the digital language laboratory presents a unique opportunity to integrate technology in the teaching of English Language, especially in a country like India. In India, we are often faced with the problems of large classroom, lack of teacher support, absence of authentic language learning environment and even poor language skill in the language teacher itself; a digital language laboratory can help students get individual attention, get immediate feedback, get enough exercises to practice the usage of language, learn correct pronunciation and intonation patterns of the language, learn verbal and non-verbal communication aspects of the language (here English). But, it also calls for a certain amount of discipline from the learner, a bit of dedication from the teacher and infrastructural support from the school authorities. This infrastructural support need not be in the form of latest branded computers or expensive proprietary software, it could be assembled computers with Free Software Programs. The learning of English can be interesting for most students provided the content is presented in a manner that is interesting and interactive. A teacher may fail to cater to these demands owing to a number of factors, but a computer, with its multifaceted options, can come to rescue of the teacher as an aid to enhance the teaching and learning of English. Let it not be forgotten, the computer cannot replace the teacher, for ultimately, it is the teacher who will decide how, when and where the language learning material will be presented. It will just make the journey of language learning interesting.

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