Employing Online Resources: An Effective way to Learn English Language

Dr. Krishna Chaitanya E

Assistant Professor of English, Department of Mathematics and Humanities (M&H)
Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Technology (MGIT), Gandipet (Village),
Rajendranagar (Mandal) Hyderabad-500075, Telangana State, India

Abstract: Today's world of communication has entered an era of advanced technology. There are mounting demands on every individual, including students of all disciplines, to turn out to be techno-savvy. Therefore, besides learning general English as an international language, students need to be equipped with adequate communicative ability so that they can transmit their message clearly. Good communication skills in English can be a key as well as a contributing factor to their professional recognition and career prospect. The present paper analyses two aspects: (1) The English language learning resources available in ELT websites besides other on line techniques to enhance English language among the students; (2) The impact of internet resources on the teaching and learning of English. Internet is a vast repository of information in modern times. As to the first viewpoint, two sub points are covered: i. The significant role the web plays in contributing endless interactive English language learning resources. There are a several number of promising and updated ELT websites. ii.

The students can also enrich their English as they read more authentic articles from the internet. This apart, they have the opportunity to communicate with their foreign friends in English. They can practise a wide variety of language learning activities like quizzes on Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation and LSRW skills. More importantly they can practise for language testing exams like TOEFL, IELTS, and GRE etc. For a better learning approach, these activities are categorized conveniently as Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced levels. In the second viewpoint mentioned above, the following two sub points are presented: i. The impact of the internet resources on the students in English learning. They can improve their English by comprehensively apprehending the genuine ways of communication on the net viz. Synchronous (Happening at the same time i.e., Video Conference and Chat rooms) and Asynchronous (Not occurring or existing at the same time or place i.e., e-mail). ii. The impact of the internet resources on ELT teachers. On the one hand, internet provides English teachers with abundant updated materials and teaching methods; on the other hand, it limits the role of a language teacher to being a facilitator and a guide and widens the scope of learner-centered method. However, a great deal of success comes from encouraging and preparing students to interact and learn in this online environment.

Keywords: ELT, Technology, Internet Resources, Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Technology has become a significant part of our life for the last few decades. A rapid development in the field of technology has made many things possible for us. Gradually it has occupied a very crucial part of our present life style. Its impact has permeated into
all facets of our life, including educational settings. This innovative transformation has been heralded by many as a sign of the future in which language teaching will be driven by new advances in computer and in the internet.

Teaching English language to students who do not speak English is one of the exciting challenges of the present day to the language teachers. This problem is ubiquitous in many parts of the world. For this large group, becoming proficient in a new language is a very painful transition. This process can be frustrating and sometimes backbreaking. Students learning a new language need as much support as possible. They need a variety of language experiences. They need to hear language, write language, speak language and read language. It helps them to sharpen their communication skills; in turn this ability can be a key as well as a contributing factor to their professional recognition and career prospect.

Internet resources play a positive role in creating enthusiasm and zeal in the students to enrich their communicative and linguistic ability. Due to many latest technological advancements internet can also integrate many skills together. The paper begins with a brief history of internet and its various applications to strengthen English language among the L2 students. It is followed by the analysis of English language resources available on different ELT websites on the internet to enhance English language among the L2 students. Next part of the paper covers the impact of internet

resources on the teaching and learning of English. The concluding part of the paper analyses the negative impact of the internet.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERNET

The first version of the internet was started during the 1960's in the United States as APRA net, a defence department network. Here one computer was linked to another to share information. Gradually more computers were added to the network and people began to send simple messages over the network to distant colleagues. This, at that time, was considered to be incredible communications platform. Later it was adopted by academic community and, with robust improvements added by European computer wizards, became the friendly tool (Internet) of the present day (Dede Teeler and Peta Gray 2007).

The Internet is an invaluable asset of the present day competitive world as it enables every individual to get acquainted with the rapid progress made in all spheres of human life. Internet commonly known as Net is also known as Cyber Space, the Information Superhighway, the Online Community, the Electronic Library, and the Digital Revolution, all a series of metaphors that define it. Basically, it is a network of people and information by telephone lines that are connected to computers to form this vast global communication system. This is the road of the information superhighway (Dede Teeler and Peta Gray 2007). Hence, we can say that internet is a combination of telecommunication and computers. Referring in this context, Anglin (1995) comments:

The Internet is a collection of interconnected computer networks all sharing the TCP/IP protocol. Although many of the participating networks are tightly controlled by a variety of institutions and businesses, the Internet itself is scarcely controlled at all. It is almost organic and has a virtual life of its own. (35)

 The author commented on internet's global network and on its organic and virtual life. Hence, it can be immensely useful to the students as a support system to enhance their communicative competence. Internet's World Wide Web (WWW) provides extensive and encyclopedic material, but if they are to be of use, they need to be tailored to classroom use (Shipman, 1996). The Internet can only be a valuable mode of learning, when its material is tailored to suit students needs in ELT. Particularly the level must match the students' understanding. Also additional instruction to help students understand what they are going to discover must be provided. To facilitate their learning, they should equip with some skills. Skills taught to students cover those of reading, particularly skimming, and writing. Furthermore, specific ELT websites are to be informed to them to access to a wide variety of language learning activities. This does not hinder their chance to browse for other websites via search engine on their own as part of independent learning (Leong, 1999).

Anglin (1995) concludes that the mean scores should be significantly higher for computer taught items than for non-computer taught items. Internet is also considered to be the better motivator in learning a language.

Exploring Internet Content

Now, it is time to make a plunge into the complex world of the Internet. It is a vast repository of an extremely vast collection of information, but sifting through it effectively is a more challenging task than we lead students to believe. In fact, just telling students to go to the Internet to search for something is similar to, as several authors put it, "trying to get a drink of water from a gushing fire hydrant" (Warschauer, Shetzer, & Meloni, 2000, p. 85). In other words, the Internet is an almost measureless repository of great content, but it also contains an equal amount of junk, and sifting through this large collection can be daunting.

Hence, teachers should help the students learn to critically examine information on the net in terms of credibility, authority, citation, timeliness and accuracy.   Unfortunately, students latch on to whatever first appears on their screens.

Internet and its Various Applications for Language Enrichment

The role of Internet in English language development of L2 students is praiseworthy. There are authentic resources, material and places where they can find a wide variety of language learning activities, quizzes and can share their ideas with native speakers around the world. Internet as the primary communication vehicle provides not only umpteen opportunities for students but also makes the learning process lively and appealing. Some of the features which can provide students with information and support are as follows:

i) Discussion Lists or Groups and Message Boards

Discussion groups and message boards have been set up specifically to allow students to contact each other and talk about subjects of mutual interest. These lists function in the same way as those of the teacher listservs. By joining message boards and mailing lists they can have access the knowledge and experience of many other students.

ii) Chat Programmes

This is where "real time" or synchronous technology comes in and allows communicating in real time, that is, instantaneous. A chat room is a facility on the web, which allows everyone to communicate directly, and instantly with other people online. Unlike email, messages are displayed on the screen as they are written.

iii) Moo Virtual Environments

MOO refers to 'Multi-User Object-Oriented Dimension'. This is a meeting place on the NETprovided by SchMOOze University. It gives students a friendly location to practise their English. It is also an excellent place to meet other teachers new to MOOs who are interested in their application to the English language teaching. MOO master co-ordinates the NETEACH-L biweekly teacher discussions (i.e.http://web.new.ufl.edu/tari/connections and http://schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE RESOURCES ON INTERNET

There is a plethora of devoted ELT websites available on the internet. These tend to have been created either by language schools (in some cases the schools are themselves entirely online) or by dedicated individuals. These sites are furnished with interactive exercises, where students for example, choose the correct multiple choice answers and then check the answers by clicking on a button to receive instant feedback. English Language learning software is often expensive and difficult to employ in the class room. Hence, language teachers can browse through the Internet to find wonderful material free of cost without wasting money and time.

Though there are a large number of ELT websites, this paper confined itself to a limited number of websites. Here are the best six sites available.

i) www.a4esl..org

The most effective learning resource on the Internet is 'Activities for ESL Students'. It is a part of The Internet TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) Journal. It can be found at http://www.a4esl.org. . It is a wonderful resource where language teachers can find more than thousand quizzes and a variety of other effective learning activities for their students. There are many more free resources available to help them and their students. There are different links maintained by the Internet TESL Journal: 'Links for Teachers' and 'Links for Students' unlike many link pages, these links are kept up-to-date. They can be found on the Internet TESL Journal's website at http://iteslj.org/links/.

ii) www.e-mesh.com

It is one of the most effective language learning resources on the internet. It is noted for free interactive multi media resources which are categorized into two centers i.e. Learners' center and Teachers' center.

Learners' centre provides different kinds of language learning activities both on grammar and vocabulary. In Every Day English some common conversation practices are found on Transport, Food and Drink, House and Home etc. In Work Skills section, some tips are given for Getting a job, Sales & Marketing. In Listening Section, interesting activities are presented on Guess the object, People talking about Vox Populi (popular opinion). In Grammar Section, many exercises are found on the Parts of speech, Question words and Tenses.

In Vocabulary Section, a bag of assorted words is found on many fields. In Games Section, the exercises are based on word search, hangman and memory cards.

The Teachers' Centre is furnished with Ready-to-use lesson plans, Top articles, Authentic resources and Images, Sound and Video files. Quick ideas are offered for busy teachers which can be read at a glance and use immediately in class.

iii) www.englishclub.com

English club is one of the best ESL websites for every language learner. It is popularly known as club where one can:

- Study English grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation
- Play ESL games and do ESL quizzes online
- Discuss anything with other students and teachers around the world
- Find English schools worldwide where one can learn ESL at home or abroad
- Find pen pals to email in English
- Find ESL learning aids to improve one's English
- Test one's level in English
- Get help on English grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation

iv) www.eslcafe.com

Dave's ESL Café is one of the best and regularly updated English language teaching websites on the Net. It is maintained by Dave Sperling. It offers many discussion forums and chat rooms. A platform to meet and share information from students around the world. The web page is equipped with variety of café (language) items and four different categories like Jobs, Stuff for Teachers, Stuff for Students and Stuff for Every one.

Of the categories mentioned above, the third category named "Stuff for Students" is a repository for the learners. It provided various interesting activities on all important aspects of the language like Help Center, Hint-of-the-Day, Idioms, Phrasal Verbs, Pronunciation Power, Quizzes, Slang, and Student Forums. The learners can take an interactive quiz in the ESL Quiz Center; receive help with questions related to English language in the ESL Help Center. They can also search for something in the cafe or on the Web in the One-Stop ESL Search Page; share their experiences with others in the ESL Idea Page. They can read and add their own writings to the ESL Graffiti Wall, or ask a question on the ESL Question Page.

v) www.examenglish.com

This is an exclusive website for free practice material on language testing exams like TOEFL, IELTS, CAE, and FCE. It is a repository for a rich number of English language learning activities. There are different sections found on Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Testing, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. These activities are divided into basic, intermediate and advanced levels conveniently for the learners.

Software and CDs of language testing exams are quite expensive and is often found to be difficult to use. In order to overcome this situation, students and teachers of English can make the best use of the mock tests provided on this site. Since it is updated regularly there is a lot of scope for quality, content and accuracy. These will certainly increase their chances to get good score in the English language testing exams.

vi) www.esl-lab.com

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab is one of the promising and regularly updated listening websites on the Net. It is a user friendly website and its listening activities are divided into three kinds i.e. Easy, Difficult and Medium-all very motivating.

Esl.com offers a wide range of listening activities i.e. General Listening Quizzes, Listening Quizzes for Academic Purposes, 20-Minute ESL Vocabulary Lessons and Long Conversations with Real Video are presented with an aim at enhancing its users listening skills. The activity 'General Listening Quizzes' is equipped with everyday conversations with adult and children's voices. The second feature 'Listening Quizzes for Academic Purposes' is furnished with material for TOEFL/TOEIC tests with many more exercises. They are explained with lectures, interviews, and conversations. The third feature '20-Minute ESL Vocabulary Lessons' is aimed at developing vocabulary and pronunciation of its users. The last feature 'Long Conversations with Real Video' assists with some prerecorded interviews and conversations to widen the scope of listening ability of the learners at different situations in their life.

Impact of Internet Resources on the Teaching and Learning of English

Since Internet is an area which has come up recently, it has covered under lot of research in order to find its effectiveness and to suggest some innovative ways for further developments.

Many studies focussed on the objective assessment of the effectiveness of internet. Most of the studies of such kind reported positive feedback on using internet in language teaching. A few of them reported in the negative. Some suggested taking caution. Some research works focussed on developing a particular skill through Internet and some others focussed on the learner/teacher attitudes towards this technology. But, altogether almost all studies expressed optimism about integrating web based technology in ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as Foreign Language) classrooms.

i) Impact of Internet Resources on the Teaching of English

Though internet has been a boon its potentiality was realised very recently by educators. They realised that it can also be a relenting resource for second and foreign language classrooms. It is evident that there is a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of English. Speaking in this context, Ian Forsyth (1998) comments:

The shift in the paradigm is based in technology and under the control of learners. The learning process is enabled by technology and facilitated by industrial application that minimizes the need of bricks and mortar facilities like schools and universities. The new paradigm faces teachers with a fundamental challenge to their role and ultimately causes that role to change. That the paradigm change is with us is evidenced not so much by examples (although these exist) but by the backlash that is evident in the attempts by the teachers to control the technology that is the tool of the new paradigm. (6)

Discussing the above aspect, Mark Warschauer (2000) puts it:

The Internet is a fantastic tool for teachers. It is not the answer to simple teaching or learning, but it is an incredibly motivating resource for both teachers and learners. Though it is not always easy to use and it does have its problems, it is still a motivating and engaging resource for both students and the teachers. (45)

Researches carried out on this area detailed about the potential benefits of internet resources for English language teachers. The role of internet in the changing times was loud and clear. Internet is not only a vast source of information but also an endless source of inspiration and driving force for language teachers and learners. It was also made clear how the use of internet resources altered the role of English language teachers and promoted the learner-centric approach. Internet had a positive impact on the part of shy learners too as it promoted independent learning with instant feedback to them.

The impact of internet on the language teachers was also optimistic and praiseworthy as opined above. Internet resources provided sufficient support and strength to the teachers to use them for their classroom purposes. There were ready-made lesson plans, interactive activities on LSRW skills, practice materials for language testing exams like TOEFL, IELTS, GRE etc., and many more were available on the internet for them. The sources mentioned above widen ways to make their teaching productive and informative for their students. Hence, internet is also considered to be the better motivator in learning a language.

ii) Impact of Internet Resources on the Learning of English

Listening Skill

Internet resources available for listening skill on the web generate interest and enthusiasm in the students. Since listening material on the web divided into different levels i.e., Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced it will become easy for L2 students to choose, practise and excel their English language proficiency. This process of categorization has a great impact on the students and in turn gradual progress will also be found in their listening ability.

ELT websites provided listening activities for general purpose i.e., everyday dialogues and conversation practise; and academic purpose i.e., practice material and tips for TOEFL, IELTS, GRE (www.examenglish.com). Besides these, some long conversations were provided with pre-recorded interviews, presentation skills, role-plays (www.esl-lab.com). Interactive resources of this kind would certainly involve students and also enable them to face the challenges of the changing times.

Speaking Skill

Internet is one of the latest technologies which could create authentic or real time atmosphere to enrich speaking skills of the L2students. Tools like video-conference and net phone on the internet are well known as synchronous communication (occurring at the same time). These tools can also be used with the L2 students so as to involve them in genuine communication. The students will be very excited as they participate in a video conference with the native students. This will expose them first hand to English culture and language. The whole experience will be exciting and motivating.

Reading Skill

Internet is a fantastic tool of the present day. It evokes genuine interest in the L2 students to enrich their reading skills. Mike (1996) observed that there had been gradual development found in the students, when they were asked to find information on the net so as to write an organized essay on a topic. He felt this searching purpose would ignite their reasoning and logic skills i.e., once the information has been obtained, the results must be reviewed which requires scanning, discarding and evaluative judgement on part of the students. The information gathered must be put together and organized according to coherence to bring a finer form. This effort would allow students to sharpen their reading skills and strategies. In addition to this, the internet also advances literacy for genuine purposes, as mentioned previously. Apart from being a supplement to reading material, especially current information, when students are exploring the Net, they are essentially exploring the real world (Mike, 1996).

Writing Skill

Internet has been used in two creative ways to develop writing skills in real time atmosphere - one of the innovations being use of electronic mail (e-mail), a specific feature of the internet. The second one is the use of chat rooms and listservs/discussion groups.

E-mail is encouraging students to use computers in realistic and authentic situations in order to develop communicative and thinking skills. E-mail is easy to use and even teachers intimidated by computers would quickly become adept at using e-mail with their students. Furthermore even timid or inhibited students could benefit from the meaningful interaction and communication via e-mail.

Mireia Trenchs (1996) performed a case study of three students learning Spanish as their second language. The study was done in New York City. She ultimately discovered that using electronic mail as a supplement to the classroom curriculum can be effective. The students voluntarily used the e-mail. They were self-motivated to use their new language in a new and creative way. One of the benefits of using electronic mail included the scrolling feature that allowed the students to view the incoming message and use its structure as a model for creating a response. The scrolling feature also allowed students to easily edit and revise. The major benefit of using e-mail as a language learning activity is the fact that students are using meaningful language and authentic text.

Some of the studies mentioned so far expressed the impact of using e-mail, chat rooms and listservs with the students. They explained how these tools created a real time atmosphere for them to develop their writing skills. When students were asked to send and respond to e-mails among themselves, a gradual progress had been found. They were also encouraged to participate in online chatting with native students of English and be a part of listservs/discussion groups and it inculcated a genuine habit of writing in them. Soon, the students were found engrossed and involved in these activities and a feeling of determination and improvement was also found in them and were unconsciously using the language.

Internet provided copious language activities which can provide their students with additional practice in particular areas of language learning. These areas were reading tests and comprehension questions, grammar exercises, pronunciation exercises possible through available multimedia capabilities, cloze tests, vocabulary exercises, and so forth. Since they recommended some productive ELT websites, students would go through, practise and develop their English language ability (Mike, 1996).

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF INTERNET

Though internet has been very useful to language teachers and students, it also has its own problems, like flaming, viruses, worms, technical etc. So, the language teachers need to be aware of these limitations, not only to avoid or mitigate them, but also to provide effective pedagogical application of the technologies.

It is also equally important to remember for every individual that internet cannot replace the language classroom or the amount of interaction between English language teacher and his/her students, but it provides a wide variety of information, interactive activities and lends itself to authentic communication possibilities that can greatly enrich the language teaching and learning experience (Singhal, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The concept of use of internet resources in the teaching and learning of English has been shown in a range of studies to facilitate learning in a variety of ways. Internet can be used to aide teaching and learning of English. In particular, internet has become a conduit where people can teach, learn, share, and collaborate in ways an unprecedented way. Ultimately, however, it is important to recognize that internet is not a substitute for effective teaching. It can only be a tool which is one type of supplement to the regular language teaching. Therefore, if we incorporate technology as discussed here, our neo and refocused approach to teaching will have a breath of fresh air. Technology will there fore be complimenting and compatible partner in the teaching and learning process.

REFERENCES

1.   Anglin, Gary. *Instructional Technology, Past, Present and Future*, London: Libraries Unlimited, Inc. 1995.
2.   Davis, Randall. *Utopia or Chaos? The Impact of Technology on Language Teaching*, The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XII, No. 11, November 2006   http://iteslj.org/

3.   Leong, Nee. "Using IT in the Teaching and Learning of Writing Educational Technology" Conference, Singapore.1999.

4.   Mike, D. "Internet in the Schools: A Literacy Perspective." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 40(1) (1993): 1-13. http://iteslj.org/Articles/Singhal Internet.html
5.   VschMOOze University homepage: http://schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888/
6.   Schrum, L. (2000). Technology as a tool to support instruction. Retrieved February 12,   2008, from the World Wide Web: http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/tech/tech004.shtml
7.   Shipman III, et.al. (1996). Creating Educational Guided Paths over the World Wide Web in Educational Telecommunications.

8. Singhal, Meena. (No Date). "The Internet and Foreign Language Education: Benefits and Challenges." (Online): 27th Aug. 2007. Available: http://www.gse.uci.edu/ed168/resume.html.

9. Teeler, Dede, and Peta Gray. *Use the Internet in ELT*. Oxford shire: Blue Stone Press, 2007.

10. Telewest.co.uk. (2002). Internet rage sweeps the UK. Retrieved May 26, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.telewest.co.uk/ourcompany/pressreleases/internetragesweepstheuk.ht ml

11. Trenchs, M. (1996). Writing strategies in a second language: Three case studies of learners using electronic mail. The Canadian Modern Language Review, 52 (3), 464-497.

12. Warschauer, Mark. The Internet for English Teaching: Guidelines for Teachers. TESL Reporter 30, 1 (1996), p.p. 27-33.

Webliography

1) www.examenglish.com
2) www.englishclub.com
3) www.e-mesh.com
4) www.esl-lab.com
5) www.4esl.org
6) www.eslcafe.com