Are Indian Language Teachers Prepared for the Web World? 
A Case Study

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Abstract

This study presents the data collected from 20 teachers of 'Communication Skills' from ten engineering colleges of Punjab, India. A well structured questionnaire was used to solicit information for the following research questions: (a) What are the teachers' attitudes towards teaching English using the internet? (b) What are the challenges faced by teachers in using the internet to teach English? (c) What are the teachers' suggestions to overcome these challenges? The results reveal that although the teachers use the internet frequently for entertainment and communication purposes, they rarely use web resources and tools for English language teaching (ELT). The findings indicate the lack of training as a major reason for not using the internet for the teaching-learning purposes. This study also offers some suggestions like adequate teacher training and full time technical support to facilitate language learning through the internet.

Key words: Teacher Training, ELT, Internet and language learning and Teaching through technology
The turn of the century has witnessed a profound impact of technology on education and English Language Teaching (ELT) is not an exception. With the advent of the internet era and its new means of communication facilitating collaboration between groups and individuals all over the world, English teachers need to take part in that Information revolution of today. Instant access to all kinds of information has created new favorable conditions for teaching and learning languages. Though they are well aware of the revolutionary technological tools yet they are not confident enough to use them for the teaching purposes. Through this paper the researcher has attempted to find out the reasons and the challenges for the same. In this study, the focus is the use of the internet to teach English to the students of the engineering colleges of Punjab, India.

The following research questions direct the investigation of this research:
1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards teaching English using the internet?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in using the internet to teach English?
3. What are the teachers' suggestions in order to overcome these challenges?

The aim of this paper is to show the current status of the competence of English teachers to use the internet in their classrooms. In the last few years the number of teachers using Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has increased tremendously and numerous articles have been written about the role of technology in education in the 21st century. Although the potential of the the internet for educational use has not been fully explored yet and the colleges on average still make limited use of computers and the internet, it is obvious that we have entered a new information age in which the links between technology and language teaching have already been established.

The development of the internet has brought about a revolution in the teachers' perspective, as the teaching tools offered through it are gradually becoming more reliable. Today, the internet has gained immense popularity in second language teaching and more and more educators and learners are embracing it. Research and practice suggest that, appropriately implemented, network-based technology can contribute significantly to the following:

**Motivation**

Computers are most popular among students either because they are associated with fun and games or because they are considered to be fashionable. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered, which make them feel more independent.

**Enhanced Student Achievement**

Technology-based instructions can help students strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence.

**Authentic Materials for Study**

Authenticity ensures both face-validity and content-validity. Authentic materials like company brochures, product samples, latest news items and the like is motivating for many learners. All
students can use various resources of authentic reading materials either at college or from their home. Those materials can be accessed 24 hours a day.

Greater Interaction
Random access to Web pages breaks the linear flow of instruction. By sending E-mail and joining newsgroups, students can communicate with people they have never met. They can also interact with their own classmates. Furthermore, some internet activities give students positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their on-line exercises. Even a user can interact with the material on a web-site in one way or the other. Types of interactivity include:

- Choice of route through the material. This can be determined by the user, using hyperlinks to move off in different directions.
- Choice of media. The user can make decisions about how many times to listen to an audio-clip, or choose when and whether to access a video clip etc.
- Submission of answers or information. The learner fills in a form or completes an activity, submits this and receives some kind of feedback.
- Customizing. The learner can input the data and receive specific information. For example, the user can customize the design of a car on the Honda web-site. On-line booking of travel tickets and accommodation are further examples of this type of interactivity.

Individualization
Shy or inhibited students, who are otherwise competent, can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning. High fliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace.

Range of Material
The World Wide Web, which resides on the internet, provides a vast repository of material which can be used in language lessons. Although students can still use their books, they are given the chance to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfils the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world.

Global Understanding
A foreign language is studied in a cultural context. In a world where the use of the internet becomes more and more widespread, an English Language teacher's duty is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel citizens of a global classroom, practicing communication on a global level.

Davis et al. (1989) have developed a theory of action called the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain computer-usage behavior that relates to reasons why some people use computers and their attitudes towards them. Their model, shown in Figure 1, links the perceived usefulness and ease of use with attitude towards using ICT and actual use. They discovered that people's computer use was predicted by their intention to use it and that perceived usefulness was strongly linked to these intentions. A positive attitude towards performing certain behaviors was related to the perceived value of those behaviors. According to Malhotra and Galletta (1999), TAM has emerged as one of the most influential models in
Dawes and Selwyn (1999) found that a major deterrent to use the computer by teachers was computer phobia. The teachers' anxieties could be caused by a few factors. The first one is psychological factor such as having little or no control over the students' activity. Teachers do not want to be seen as incompetent in the eyes of their students. They have the fear that the students possess more knowledge of computers than they do. The second factor is the fear of being replaced by the computer in the long term. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), when experienced teachers are subjected to changes, they may experience three particular clusters of feelings as follows: (a) loss of firmly held beliefs and ideas, established patterns and behaviors, comfortable habits and confidence and self-esteem; (b) anxiety about required levels of understanding, new skills, future prospects, being able to cope and being seen as different and; (c) struggle to survive intact, acquire new competence and gain respect and recognition. In a report on the barriers that exist in schools that prevent teachers from making full use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching, Jones (2004) has summarized some of the key findings as follows:

- A very significant determinant of teachers' levels of engagement in ICT is their level of confidence in using the technology;
- There is a close relationship between levels of confidence and many other issues which themselves can be considered as barriers to ICT;
- Levels of access to ICT are significant in determining levels of use of ICT by teachers;
- Inappropriate training styles result in low levels of ICT use by teachers;
- Teachers are sometimes unable to make full use of technology because they lack the time needed to fully prepare and research materials for lessons;
- Technical faults with ICT equipment are likely to lead to lower levels of ICT use by teachers;
- Power problem in the region contributes immensely to the reluctance of teachers for the use of ICT.
- Resistance to change is a factor which prevents the full integration of ICT in the classroom;
- Teachers who do not realize the advantages of using technology in their teaching are less likely to make use of ICT;
- There are close relationships between many of the identified barriers to ICT use; any factors influencing one barrier are likely also to influence several other barriers.

The findings of another study by Mohd Yunus (2007) regarding the main challenges to ICT integration perceived by language teachers technical institutions comes to the conclusion that technology integration in teaching “…is dependent upon adequate access, adequate computer resources, teacher development opportunities, and onsite support all of which require funding, thought, planning and support.”

**Methodology**

The respondents in the present study consisted of 20 teachers who teach English in various engineering colleges in the state of Punjab in India. All of the respondents were university post-graduates and had at least 3 years of teaching experience. A well structured questionnaire was distributed among the 24 teachers of 10 engineering colleges of the state. The response rate was 83.33 per cent, which was sufficient for analyzing the teaching and learning process of teachers of engineering colleges across the state. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. They were given a week to complete the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the main sections of the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Main sections of the questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title of Section</th>
<th>Type of information requested</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Personal details of a teacher</td>
<td>Name, age, teaching experience, email id</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teachers' usage of the internet</td>
<td>Frequency in using the internet, purposes of using the internet, awareness of the services provided by the internet, types of the internet resources regularly used, impact of using the internet in the class on students' learning level advantages of using the internet to teach</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td>Duration of training/courses, adequacy of the attended training</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Challenges faced by English teachers in using the internet to teach English</td>
<td>Possible reasons that could have discouraged a teacher from using ICT to teach English in a classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ways to overcome challenges faced by English teachers in using the internet to teach</td>
<td>Suggestions on what can be done to encourage teachers to use the computers to teach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Items** 14
Results and Discussions

The majority of the teachers under study were in their 30's. There were 12 teachers (60%) in this age group. Only 6 teachers were below 30 years old and there were 2 teachers (38.8%) who were above 40 years old. The majority of the teachers, 14 (70%), had at least five years of experience. The mean years of working experience as a teacher was 08 years, which showed that most of these teachers were very experienced teachers. The youngest teacher was 26 years old, with three years of experience whereas the most senior teacher was 58 years old with 32 years of experience. All of the teachers (100%) owned a computer at home. Figure 2 shows the frequency of the teachers' use of the internet.

![Figure 2: Teachers' frequency of using the internet](image)

In order to assess the frequency of using the internet services, the time gap has been classified into four different categories (Figure 2). It has been found that 45% of the academic community uses the internet 2-3 times a week. 30% of the respondents use the internet every day, while 15% of the teachers reported to use internet only fortnightly. Only 10% of the respondents use it once a month. On average the majority of the users from all the engineering colleges of Punjab use the internet almost once a week.

![Figure 3: Purposes for browsing the internet](image)

Figure 3 depicts that a majority of the respondents i.e. 35% use the internet primarily for communication, 30% for entertainment, 25% for teaching and 10% for research purpose.
Figure 4. Teachers' frequency of using the internet to teach English.

As Figure 4 shows 10% of the academic community uses the internet very often to teach English language in the classroom, whereas 25% of them use it often. 50% of the respondents use the internet rarely and about 15% of them do not use the internet at all. If a comparison is made of figure 2, 3 and 4, it becomes clear that though most of the language teachers use the internet for the purposes of entertainment and communication but rarely do they use it for the teaching purpose.

Table 2. Advantages of using the internet as a teaching aid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Improves presentation of teaching material</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Makes my lessons more diverse and interesting</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Enhances my confidence level and career prospects</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>8 (40%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Gives me more control in the classroom</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, we turn to advantages of using computer to teach English (Table 2). When answering statement A, 16 teachers (80%) agreed that the internet use improved their presentation more interesting, lively and colourful. The majority of the teachers, which totaled up to 13 teachers (65%), agreed with statement B that the internet use made their lessons more diverse and interesting. 09 teachers (45%), believed that using web resources might enhance their career prospects. However, eight (40%) other teachers did not think so. Only four teachers (20%) agreed that the use of technology gave them more control in classroom while 14 teachers (70%) did not agree. Two teachers rather strongly disagree with the statement.
Unfortunately, most teachers today do not have sufficient technological training to guide their students exploring computer and its assisted language learning programs. Therefore, the benefits of computer technology for those students who are not familiar with computer are inexistent. Figure 5 shows teachers' duration of training and adequacy of training that they had undergone. Only 7 out of twenty teachers got trained in how to use computers to teach English, and the training period ranged from 1 day to 5 days. There is a positive correlation between the usage of computer to teach and the duration of computer training. When we compare the results of Figure 4 with Figure 5, we can see that only the trained teachers use the internet in their lessons but those who have not undergone any relevant training do not have confidence to use the internet tools in their classes. As for those teachers who had had previous training in using the internet applications for teaching, 06 stated that the courses they had attended so far were not adequate to equip them with the necessary knowledge.

General challenges faced by the teachers

Teachers find that using the internet is time-consuming and more difficult. It takes lot of time and effort to design, edit and modify their lessons on the web according to the need of their students. In this information explosion age, millions of web sites one found from a powerful search engine such as Google are just a tip of the iceberg. For example, one teacher said that she typed "English learning" as key words in Google to look for web sites; it responded 55,600,000 matched items found in 0.08 second. So, sometimes even information overload on the web lead to techno-stress to teachers. The next challenge faced by the English teachers is the content of the lessons. 06 teachers (30%) believed that using the computer to teach restricted the contents of their lessons. The reason could be because they had to prepare materials for teaching that follow the syllabus closely. However, twelve teachers (60%) did not
think so. All of the teachers believed that using the computer to teach in the classroom would be difficult without good technical support from the technicians. It seems that teachers were discouraged to use the computer to teach if they had to solve technical problems by themselves. Above all, 90% teachers reported the lack of adequate teacher training as a major barrier. Other challenges encountered by the teachers were as bellow:

(a) availability of limited software in the school;
(b) being stressed to use computers to teach English as they had difficulties locating the teacher in charge of the computers whenever they wanted to use them;
(c) setting up the computer and LCD projector themselves before each lesson as well as putting them away properly after each lesson making a waste of precious time and;
(d) malfunctioning of the computer which in turn will distract students' attention and disrupt lessons.

Suggestions

Suggestions from the English language teachers for improving the situation include availability of an easily accessible resource room or centre that is manned by a full-time trained personnel who can be contacted at all times to assist the teachers when needed, and availability of more suitable and practical computer courses. Last but not the least pre-service and in-service training for the teachers should be made mandatory. Especially university or college sponsored workshops are necessary and valuable, where pedagogy and theories of using technology are addressed. Teachers stressed that though hefty funds are spent for the purchase of equipment, yet imparting training to make the teachers tech-savvy is generally ignored which results in sheer wastage of the equipment as well. They feel that emphasis should be on the adequacy of the training rather than on the frequency of the same.

Even Ministry of Human Resources and Development in its TEQIP: Project Implementation Plan (2009) reported that the lack of faculty training is exerting enormous pressure on the educational delivery system to meet quality benchmarks. This factor is adversely affecting knowledge and skill acquisition by students thereby lowering their employability (only 25% at present). It advocates regular training for faculty so that they can make optimum use of modern equipments, course specific software and ultra modern technological tools to make teaching-learning process more effective.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that although most of the teachers use the internet frequently for entertainment and communication purposes yet they rarely use the resources and tools provided by the internet to teach English language. They are even well aware of the advantages of using the internet resources for their teaching. One major reason underlined by them is that many of the teachers are not adequately trained to use computers and web tools
and their applications in ELT. That is why they not only feel incompetent and uncomfortable using the internet and related tools but have become techno phobic. So it becomes important that adequate training should be imparted among the teachers to help them use technology for teaching English.

References


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