Chapter 60

Impact of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning on the Writing Skills of Engineering Students:
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The present case study investigates the effectiveness of technology use in the writing skills of the students at the tertiary level. The subjects of this research were 80 students of an engineering college of Punjab, India. The project was implemented on the basis of the experimental method with a pretest-posttest control group design. At the outset of the project, all the subjects were given a standardized writing test. Following which, the students of the experimental group were made to perform their writing activities using technology in the language lab throughout the semester. Thereafter their performance was assessed and the results were further compared with the students of the control group as well as with their own performance in the pre-test. The results revealed that the achievement in the writing skills of the students under treatment improved significantly. Lastly, the researcher elicited information about students' perceptions on the use of technological tools.

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of computers, the Internet and the communication facilitated by them in this digital era has transformed the lifestyle of people. The cutting edge technologies are making their presence felt in almost every field and education should not remain an exception. It would be unwise to limit the teaching to the traditional set up only. Rather the fabric of education should be colored with all the different

hues of technology. Since the use of the Internet and its new means of communication facilitating collaboration between groups and individuals all over the world are in full swing, the researcher thought of introducing this novelty into the language learning classes to prepare students for their prospective professional skills. The top managers in the service sectors as well as in the business environs expect the educational institutions not to churn out knowledge workers, but the knowledge managers and smart leaders equipped with 21st century skills. Needless to say that writing skill has emerged as one of the most powerful skills with the turn of the century. Hitherto considered as the Cinderella skill by the professional and technical students, it was generally relegated to the back stage, but the IT revolution and globalization of business have brought this skill to the forefront in the arena of academics and industry. Success in this competitive environment now not only depends on gaining content knowledge and hard skills, but equally on acquiring effective communication skills especially the writing skills. Therefore, the effective teaching and training of the writing skills of the future professionals have taken precedence over other technical skills. The National Employability Report (2014) by Aspiring Minds underlined that more than 80 percent of engineers in India remain unemployable because of poor communication skills. The findings, therefore, underscore the need to revamp the training in language proficiency so that the students can live up to the expectations of the job market.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher observed that despite undergoing the course of communication skills in their theory and practical laboratories as a part of their curriculum in the first year, the students neither excelled nor even showed performance in various placement examinations and other competitive examinations after completing the course. It was found that many students across disciplines were not very good at communication and generally lacked the proficiency they need to meet the growing demands of the present day workplace. Though students at the completion of their graduation ended up with excellent technical skills, yet lacked in effective communication. Therefore, concrete efforts were needed to be made to prepare students for utilizing communication skills in an effective manner. But before that it was necessary to trace the reason behind this. Therefore, interviews and discussions were arranged with the students and it was realized that their English course had failed to interest them.

The researcher identified the following reasons for the poor acquisition of their language skills:

1. Boredom.
2. Lack of Interest.
3. Lack of motivation.

Students, doing their majors in the Engineering subjects, generally ignore the language acquisition and consider better spending time in canteens or completing assignments than wasting their time in doing boring grammar exercises through drills or books or writing long essays and paragraphs on current issues in the class. Since there was nothing novice to offer them, the classroom activities neither enthralled them, fascinated them nor attracted their attention. Therefore, they did not feel like attending classes or if compelled by the attendance rules, they come, they would only sit but would never learn. Hence, after identifying the problems, to overcome them and to contain absenteeism in the practical classes, the researcher started looking for the viable solutions. The thought- provoking research articles,

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