

"Understanding the role of Digital Resources as a tool and their potential contribution for English Empowerment"

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Abstract:

English is the chief vehicle of the International Communication in the world today, thus, it also empowers its surrounding. The 21st Century is embellished with different trends and technologies where English education has also taken a new dimension by diverting its aim. Exchange of data from one mind to another is no more in the fashion in this virtual world in reality. We, being educationists are expected to experiment, create, innovate and empower our learners as well as our surroundings with utmost possibilities. This empowerment doesn't only mean to provide power; it means to enable our next generation to create the better utopia. This paper is an attempt to explore those hidden possibilities through the open world of Digital Resources by taking under the consideration of its possible uses in different forms starting from, the use of Power Point Presentations to the very modern IWB as well as the power of the internet and social media . Many educationists have experimented with different techniques to enhance their prime aim: teaching. During the process a few also experienced the positive and sustainable changes in the learners. The force behind it was the use of digital / e – media.

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA:

English as a lingua franca, English as a global language, English as an international language, English as a world language, English as a medium of intercultural communication – this is only a small sample of terms which are used interchangeably by various linguists and which describe the special development of English during the last decades. English is the dominant or official language in more than 60 countries and is represented in every continent. There are approximately 6900 languages currently spoken around the world. Over 60% of the earth's population speaks only 30 languages as their

native tongue. There is no doubt that English is the most popular of the 30. From this fact, it can be understood that the English language is a vital means of communication for millions of people around the world. During the twentieth century, numerous technological inventions and developments, such as the telephone, fax, electronic mail, internet, etc have facilitated communication between people from all walks of life and the language that is used most is English, as the following quote proves. Most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all the information stored in electronic retrieval systems is in English. English has established its position as the global *lingua franca* beyond any doubt; along with this status, it has become one of the symbols together with networking, economic integration, and the Internet. The spread of English from the British Isles has taken place over a long period, starting from the early 17th century, and it has taken different forms in different parts of the world. All over the world there is a tremendous increase in demand for English because of the trend towards globalization. English is not only studied because of “top-down” educational policies of governments. Instead, individuals themselves are motivated to learn English on their own because of their interest in popular music, dance, sports, or computers. Indeed, English is a necessary skill for many workers, who leave their countries in search of better-paying jobs elsewhere. English is widely regarded as a gateway to wealth for national economies, organisations, and individuals. Knowing English is therefore key to employment in a globalized economy.

WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities. It means to gain knowledge and understanding. Self empowerment means to gain knowledge and understanding of the self. On an individual level we see empowerment as building confidence, insight and understanding, and developing personal skills, for example, being able to analyze situations and communicate more effectively with others. Within a group or community, empowerment can be taken to involve building trust, co-operation and communication between members. There must be opportunities for people to meet and exchange views

and opinions.

It is essential to gain knowledge of how we all work. What happens on the inside, what are the mechanisms that play and how do they affect our lives. This is a study on its own. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision making power of your own.
- Having access to information and resources to enable you to take proper informed decisions for yourself.
- Having a range of options that you have determined for yourself so that you can make choices.
- Having the belief in self to the extent that you feel that you can make positive change.
- Ability to learn new skills.
- Ability to change other's perceptions by democratic means.
- Increasing one's positive self image and overcoming stigma.

At the core of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power. The possibility of empowerment depends on two things. First, empowerment requires that power can change. If power cannot change, if it is inherent in positions or people, then empowerment is not possible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way. In other words, if power can change, then empowerment is possible. Second, the concept of empowerment depends upon the idea that power can expand. This second point reflects our common experiences of power rather than how we think about power. To clarify these points, we first discuss what we mean by power.

CRITICAL ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EMPOWERMENT:

People invented language to foster communication and evolve relationships. In the primitive age, languages evolved according to the local needs, culture and understanding of the people and that is why there are so many different languages in the world. Even in one country, there are several languages spoken and used. However, the need of the

present time is quite different. We are living today in a global society where human relationships are far more enhanced than yester years. Today the prime challenge is to foster the unity of mankind in the diversity of a global village. Since language is so essential for communication and so vital to develop a universal rapport, how can we achieve this aim until and unless we all know at least one international auxiliary language? And that is English. Everything starts from a thought. Thoughts are very powerful but they need language. If this powerful tool called language is used for instilling great thoughts then its purpose is solved. In this way, language can be used as a tool for empowerment and personal transformation and its emphasis should primarily be on children and youth.

The most common use of the term "empowerment" refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that it more nearly equals the power of the high power group. Empowerment plays an important role in societies marked by socio-economic inequalities that trigger stratification of opportunities in education and employment. The issue of empowerment becomes increasingly significant in developing countries which are striving for better socio-economic levels. In the wake of increasing globalisation and internationalisation, communication, and education across the borders, English language is the key towards better opportunities for employment, and is a dominant factor in upward mobility.

English has a wide preference in education at both school and college level too. There are all India level top-ranking institutions of agriculture, science, technology, management, medicine etc. It has been observed that most of the students who have studied in the public schools or Central schools are able to compete for admission to the all India level top institutions. Those who study through other English medium schools get admission in the regional institutions of higher learning. The same is true for selections to all India top central civil services. Though there is an option for the use of prominent regional languages as medium, but English medium gets higher preference for some other reasons. An important reason being the availability of instructional materials in these languages. English, a global language, has the highest instrumental value to empower people in their educational aspirations. This globalisation of English language has resulted in remarkable changes in the patterns of communication, which poses some direct and indirect challenges to the teaching of English as both a second and a foreign language in

developing countries.

The role of English in education is very significant in both school and college education. There is a preference for the study of English as a subject and its use as medium of instruction at different levels of education. There is a wide preference for oral and written communication skills in English in multinational companies, and private business. English is also preferred in the governmental organisations and public sectors too and is assigned certain functional roles. Hence, English assumes a major role in empowering children and youth and in adding values to human life.

Digital Resources: 'E-NNOVATIVE' tool for Teaching English:

English Teaching now has taken all the new dimension this new era of technically savvy students. This mainly due to their interaction with technology in many forms in both formal and informal. Teachers are responsible for juggling knowledge of where students are and where they need to go; having insights into students' special needs and progress; choices of curricular activities and materials; rules that govern children's participation; expectations from parents and communities; and the norms and rules that govern them as teachers. The addition of technology further complicates the equation and presents many new questions.

Classroom teaching is a demanding job. Most people outside education probably think teachers spend most of their time teaching, but teachers are responsible for many tasks that have little to do with classroom instruction. Beyond planning and implementing instruction, teachers are also expected to be managers, psychologists, counselors, custodians, and community "ambassadors," not to mention entertainers. If teaching sounds like an unreasonable, almost impossible, job, perhaps it is.

It is easy to understand how a teacher might become frustrated and disillusioned. Most teachers enter the profession expecting to spark the joy of learning in their students. Unfortunately, the other demands of the classroom are very distracting and consuming. We envision technology as a teacher's liberator to help reestablish the role and value of the individual classroom teacher. To do so, two things must happen. First the perspective of the classroom must change to become learner centered. Second, students and teachers must enter into a collaboration or partnership with technology in order to create a "community" that nurtures, encourages, and supports the learning process.

Technology can be a wonderful source of comprehensible input and provides students with different learning styles with additional demonstrations or concrete examples of concepts being taught in the classroom. Multimedia CDs, digital tutorials, and the Web provide a near endless source of sound, pictures, video, animation, and multimedia that can help learning within a meaningful context. Technological use in teaching English, hold the promise of providing teachers with new ways to engage students by making the process of teaching and learning student-focused. Educators can use digital resources to introduce new materials and ultimately it improves students' understanding as well as their academic outcomes. Rather than relying on aging textbooks, teachers could find the latest information and resources on different topics and introduce into their classrooms through variety of means. Students are more likely to engage actively in classroom activities that they see as relevant to their own lives or the real world. Many times, students could produce accurate communication in the classroom usually as part of a scripted exercise but were often unable to communicate successfully in English outside the classroom. The conclusion was that having students learn English only through scripted dialogues and fill-in-the-blank grammar exercises in the classroom was not enough. Students needed to interact in the classroom more like they would under real-life circumstances.

Of the many electronic teaching techniques that instructors have found useful, we have chosen five that we believe seem particularly likely to help significant numbers of teachers. All of these techniques demand an investment of time if they are to succeed, and your willingness to use them should be balanced carefully against other, perhaps more important, teaching priorities. But for each technique, there are both simple and complex ways of proceeding, and we will try to make clear the respective advantages and disadvantages.

The following are some of the ways in which teachers consider using electronic resources/digital resources involve tasks that students will usually have to perform. New technologies can help students to perform them better and more easily:

- **Administration:** The routine administration of courses (advertising a class, providing copies of the syllabus, assigning discussion sections, and getting out

course news) can be more efficiently handled with a course home page, electronic discussion groups, and e-mail lists. These tools can also dramatically improve the continuity and the community aspects of courses, helping students to engage with and learn from each other and even from people outside the course.

- **Readings/sources:** The Web and CD-ROMs provide a wider variety of secondary and primary sources (including visual and audio sources) than has previously been available. With the guidance of the teacher, students can now gain access to materials that were once accessible only to experts because they were too cumbersome to reproduce for classroom use or too expensive for students to purchase. By taking their own paths through these sources, students can bring their own evidence and arguments into lectures and discussion sections, as well as write on a wider range of research topics.
- **Papers/presentations:** Rather than performing assignments and taking exams from the teacher alone, students can perform more independent exercises in publishing, exhibit building, or assembling and presenting teaching units and other materials for their peers. A web archive of several terms' work can make the course itself an ongoing and collaborative intellectual construction.
- **Lectures:** A computer with presentation software can provide a single tool for augmenting lectures with outlines, slides, statistical charts and tables, images, music, and even video clips.
- **Connecting online:** Electronic discussion tools such as e-mail, conferencing software, and on-line chat services can seed discussion questions before the class meets, drawing out the shy students, and follow up on discussions or questions on the reading between classes. For courses without face-to-face discussion sections, these tools can bring the course to life over great distances and help overcome scheduling difficulties.

But owning, or having access to, technology is usually only a first step. Even more important is learning how to use it. This is one of the biggest challenges facing anyone who wishes to use digital tools, because the knowledge is not always easy to acquire. Many people, of course, are highly skilled in computer technology and know how to

teach themselves to do almost anything. But many other people have limited computer skills, are easily intimidated by new and unfamiliar tasks, and tend to avoid doing anything that requires them to learn something very different from the things to which they are accustomed. Many classrooms can benefit from digital resources in at least two areas: supplementary readings and primary sources, which both are highly important in the teaching of English and spreading it as a language.

To Conclude:

Language is a living structure and as such undergoes many changes in the course of its development and growth. Lately the changes that we have seen in the English language have no doubt been significant and noticeable. Changes may not be noticed solely in grammar, semantics and other characteristics of the language, but even more so in the position and everyday uses of the English language. We see empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important. Technological innovations have gone hand-in-hand with the growth of English and are changing the way in which we communicate, work, trade, entertain. The use of computer and internet technology as a teaching tool is becoming more commonplace. The Internet has fast become the most extensive resource tool available to teachers and learners across the globe. From printable off-line resources to interactive Articles, the Internet medium provides enriching activities that can be used to enhance English teaching and learning. In order to serve our students, we need to get beyond ideology and teach English in a way that empowers and does not impose. One way to do this is to think about language and its learning in a wholly different light.

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