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## E-LEARNING AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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**“ Nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching “  
(Dewey 1916:170)**

**“E-learning is really... about literacy, albeit a new kind—a literate understanding of the ideas of a time characterized by new cultural dynamics: globalization, "the new economy," and the World Wide Web. It is also... about a new form of social interaction.”**

**Peter J. Stokes, *How E-Learning Will Transform Education*, Education Week**

Many academicians have described the growth of electronic learning as explosive, unprecedented, amazing and disruptive. In fact, there are those who claim that electronic learning is unique and is the beginning of a new era of distance education. Regardless of the rhetoric, what has changed is ‘the speed and power of communications and the expanded capacity to send, receive and use information and the capacity to bridge time and space for educational purposes’. The proliferation of the personal computer along with the internet has precipitated far-reaching changes in the society. Electronic communication and digital networks are transforming the way we work and are reshaping personal communication and entertainment. This transformation has a tremendous effect on the need and opportunity to learn. Since communication is at the heart of all forms of educational interaction, it is likely that its impact on education systems, individual teachers and learners will be significant. As we gain a better understanding of the potential and strength of e-learning, it will effectively transform how we approach the teaching and learning transaction. E-learning transforms education in ways that extend beyond the efficient delivery of entertainment value of traditional approaches. Broadly defined e-learning is networked, on-line learning that takes place in a formal context and uses a range of multi-media technologies



E-learning is exciting because it enhances and enriches both content and context. The challenge is to design and create a context, with appropriate levels of social presence, which is congruent with the content and thereby culminate in the higher-order learning outcomes. Particularly, with the English language teaching where vocabulary and accents can be contextual based.

### **THE NEED FOR ELECTRONIC LEARNING**

With the opening of the new economy, leading to the transformation of the world into a small global village, it has become a necessity to communicate in a common language both for the purpose of survival and to keep the business going. This is where the role and importance of the English language has reached its zenith. The English coaching business in India is estimated to be worth anything between Rs.500 to Rs.1000 crore, largely catered to by the un-organized sector. Although a lot many people these days travel across states / countries with the prime objective of learning English for personal, academic or for specific purposes, electronic learning is slowly gaining its momentum.

### **REASONS FOR PREFERENCE OF ELECTRONIC LEARNING**

The two major reasons for using electronic learning are

- (i) cost- factor - most of the courses are available online and the expense is only on buying a computer and paying for the internet connection

and

- (ii) easy accessibility of them within the given space and time

In addition, electronic learning is now being widely used in the education sector as a supplement to the classroom teaching to help the students gain a hands on experience and to create a virtual environment to practice the acquired language. In a way it helps the



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students to find and use information, participate in the increasingly technologically oriented social networking thereby improving their communication skills. As the need for electronic learning is on the rise, it has brought about an obvious shift in the role of educators these days.

### **SHIFT IN THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Media and communication technology have transformed the traditional role of teachers to that of an information monger to a learning facilitator. Today, the ‘talk and chalk’ method has to a large extent given way for a more sophisticated and technologically advanced techniques like using softwares related to language learning and virtual classrooms (Distance Learning). Introduction of edusat has enabled most of the universities and institutions of Higher learning in the Indian context to make maximum use of the latest technology. It has made a significant impact in the field of education by providing various kinds of aids to the teachers. The use of media can help

- (i) To decrease time to achieve the desired objective
- (ii) To augment capacity of teachers
- (iii) To make learning process more interesting and hence more effective
- (iv) To provide a wider reach

However, a teacher should be able to meticulously choose the appropriate materials and effectively use them. Selecting the most appropriate medium or putting various media in different combinations can be a difficult task for a facilitator. It has been argued that the computer-based communication is the most fundamental change in communication in the last



150 years. E-learning cannot be ignored by those who are seriously committed to enhancing teaching and learning.

Umpteen free websites which are available online can be put into effective use as an add-on to the traditional pedagogical methods used by the teacher in the classroom environment. While some of them cater to specific areas, for example on phonetics, some others focus on the overall improvement of the knowledge and application of the English language in totality i.e., the four aspects of English Language viz., Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing

Some of them are:

<http://www.fonetiks.org/>

<http://www.nonstopenglish.com/>

<http://www.churchillhouse.com/english/>

<http://www.english-test.net/>

<http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/index.cfm>

<http://www.bellenglish.com/>

[www.english-online.org.uk/](http://www.english-online.org.uk/)

Listening and speaking skills of the students can be honed through electronic learning by making use of podcasts in the given classroom environment. Role plays in a way can be extended further in such methodology. It also helps students to play back what they have recorded and identify their pronunciation skills, accent, usage of vocabulary and intonation and thereby assess themselves by these parameters and improvise them. Listening to certain activities



can also be done hence exposing the students to different accents and vocabulary used in that particular context.

The idea that a podcast can be produced by just about anyone with access to the Internet has generated a lot of interest in educational circles. In English Language Teaching, the appeal is not only in providing additional listening input for students, but that students themselves can become involved in recording and producing the podcast.

### **TYPES OF ELT PODCASTS**

There are various types of podcasts which can be used with students:

#### **AUTHENTIC PODCASTS**

Podcasts that are not aimed at ELT students can often be a rich source of listening. Most of these will only be suitable for use with higher level students, but others, such as Sushi Radio are made by non native speakers of English and their duration being 5-10 minutes make them ideal for use with classes.

#### **TEACHER PODCASTS**

Produced by teachers, often for their own classes, these podcasts are usually aimed at helping students learn by producing listening content that is not available elsewhere, or that gives a local flavour. This is done by understanding the requirements of the students of a particular class and requires a lot of planning and preparation from the educator.

#### **STUDENT PODCASTS**



They are produced by students, but often with the teacher's help, wherein students can listen to them and experience the culture and hear about the lives and interests of other students from around the world. English Conversations, for example is a podcast largely made by students for students.

### **EDUCATOR PODCASTS**

Shows such as Comprehensible Input and Bit by Bit are reflective podcasts that cover methodological matters as well as podcasting for ELT teachers. Ed Tech Talk is a more general show about educational technology, which is recorded live (this is called webcasting) using free Internet telephony and then provided as a podcast.

More podcasts for students can be found by looking at directories such as [Englishcaster](#), which is directed at students and teachers of English, or other more general directories such as [Podcast Alley](#), which has a large educational section.

### **PRODUCING ONE'S OWN PODCAST**

Producing a radio show has long been a popular project choice, especially with young learners. In the past, the audience for this show would have been the class members and the teacher. Now students have the opportunity to reach a wider audience by offering their radio show as a podcast on the World Wide Web.

One advantage of recording a show and uploading it to the Web is that students will probably take more care with the preparation, knowing that it could be potentially listened to by people all over the world. After discussing and planning the contents, the learners should be involved in writing and rewriting scripts which they will revise with their classmates (and later their teacher) ensuring that the content is understandable and there are no mistakes. They will then rehearse the show before finally recording it.



Finally, the students can invite their family and friends to listen to it. The fact that they have a real audience for their show should act as a great motivator.

### **BLOGGING FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Blogging has become an increasingly popular language learning tool. A blog (short for *weblog*) is a frequently updated website that often resembles an online journal. It is so easy to create and update a blog as it requires only basic access to the Internet, and a minimum of technical knowledge.

### **TO GUIDE STUDENTS TO ONLINE RESOURCES APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR LEVEL**

The Internet has a variety of resources that are potentially useful for students. The problem is finding and directing your learners to them. For this reason, one can use tutor blog as a portal for learners.

### **TO INCREASE THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A CLASS**

A class blog can help foster a feeling of community between the members of a class, especially if learners are sharing information about themselves and their interests, and are responding to what other students are writing.

### **TO ENCOURAGE SHY STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE**

There is evidence to suggest that students who are quiet in class can find their voice when given the opportunity to express themselves in a blog.



### **TO STIMULATE OUT-OF-CLASS DISCUSSION**

A blog can be an ideal space for pre-class or post-class discussion. And what students write about in the blog can also be used to promote discussion in class.

### **AS AN ONLINE PORTFOLIO OF STUDENT WRITTEN WORK**

There is much to be gained from students keeping a portfolio of their work. One example is the ease at which learners can return to previous written work and evaluate the progress they have made during a course.

Many teachers who start to use blogs find the novelty factor is enough to create student interest in starting to use them. However, blogs work best when learners get into the habit of using them. If learners are not encouraged to post to their blogs frequently, then they can quickly be abandoned. Here, the teacher in the role of facilitator is vital for maintaining student interest.

### **TYPES OF BLOGS USED IN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Aaron Campbell (2003) has outlined three types of blogs for use with language classes:

#### **THE TUTOR BLOG**

This is run by the teacher of the class. The content of this type of blog can be limited to syllabus, course information, homework, assignments, etc. In case the teacher is involved in creative writing courses the teacher may choose to write about his or her life, sharing reflections about the local culture, target culture and language to stimulate online and in-class discussion. In this type of blog, students are normally restricted to being able to write comments to the teacher's posts.





### **THE CLASS BLOG**

This is a shared space, with both teacher and students participating. It is best used as a collaborative discussion space, an extra-curricular extension of the classroom. Students can be encouraged to reflect in more depth, in writing, on themes touched upon in class. Students are given a greater sense of freedom and involvement than with the tutor blog. A very good example of what has been done with this type of blog is Barbara Dieu's 'Bee Online'<http://beeonline.blogspot.com/>) and <http://beeonline2.blogspot.com/>

### **THE LEARNER BLOG**

This requires more time and effort from the teacher to both set up and moderate, but is probably the most rewarding. It involves giving each student an individual blog. The benefit of this is that this becomes the student's own personal online space. Students can be encouraged to write frequently about what interests them, and can post comments on other students' blogs. For examples, see the links to learner blogs from the class blog and tutor blog examples above.

One of the best reasons is to provide a real audience for student writing. Usually, the teacher is the only person who reads student writing, and the focus of this reading is usually on form, not content. With weblogs, students can find themselves writing for a real audience that, apart from the teacher, may include their peers, students from other classes, or even other countries, their parents, and potentially anyone with access to the Internet.

### **PROBABLE PROBLEMS DUE TO USAGE OF BLOGS**

#### **UNWANTED COMMENTS**

To avoid unwanted comments, one can always restrict comments to people in the class or to registered bloggers.



## **CORRECTION**

It is difficult to use a blog for correcting students. Student written work can always be corrected before posting to the blog.

## **PRIVACY**

By their very nature, most blogs are public. Anyone with access to the Web can find and read a blog, and write comments (if this feature has been turned on). If privacy is an issue, then it would be good to avoid a blogging tool that allows different levels of access rights. Live Journal <http://www.livejournal.com> is a good choice, and is particularly popular with teenagers. Live Journal allows the setting up of a closed community, which could be restricted to the members of a class or to a wider circle including other classes, parents, etc.

Writing skills can be extended further by creating a blog for the entire class and students can take up an issue or post their thoughts or opinions on various issues. To enhance their writing skills and their vocabulary students can access the online dictionaries that are available for free. It can be put into use by students to enhance their vocabulary and also to find out meanings of difficult words in use thereby assisting them in the process of their comprehension skills. The main advantage of electronic learning in this context is that students can simultaneously access the free online dictionaries for reference while browsing through a particular or certain websites.

**[www.askoxford.com/](http://www.askoxford.com/)**

**<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>**

**[www.alphadictionary.com/](http://www.alphadictionary.com/)**

**[www.thefreedictionary.com/](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/)**

**[www.m-w.com/](http://www.m-w.com/)**



<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>

E-learning comes to the rescue of teachers who are very creative and who would like to tailor make the concept, context and content and exercises to suit the needs of the respective students. The following site can be used as an authorizing tool for language courses

[www.wbtexpress.com](http://www.wbtexpress.com)

Integration of technology within the confines of the classroom can be attained only if the teachers are well versed with the usage of technology and are in a position to tailor make the technological tools to suit the requirements of both the coursework and the students. Hence, it can be said that electronic learning has redefined and extended the concept of collaborative teaching from a different perspective. In the sense that the English Language educator can equip better by gaining knowledge and training from the Computer Science or Information Technology teachers on effective utilisation of the internet and its associated media. Gone are the days when the requirements to teach English language used to be confined to the usage of blackboard, charts, class room exercises, tape-recorders and television sets in a few cases. Now the English Language teachers are forced to extend it further to the use of a computer with internet connection keeping in mind the social needs and the technological advancements. Further, the role of the teacher has been slowly transformed to the role of a facilitator.

All said and done the truth that the application of electronic learning has in a way robbed off the purity of the English language has to be accepted. With the growing trend of increased utilization of media, technology and updated gadgets related to them has had a negative impact to a certain extent on the students. Especially in terms of shortening the content of their communication or at times changing the spelling of words. As in the case of CU (See You), 2mrw (Tomorrow), BTW (By The Way), FYI (For Your Information), clas (for class), wat (for what), wru (for where are you), hru (for how are you), tel (for tell). This influence of sms lingo in a formal environment as in the case of classroom / workplace / business environment has to be



consciously avoided by them. With the art of letter writing and diary writing being replaced by e-mails and blogs it is indeed a fact that the English Language has lost its original beauty.

Thus it can be concluded that a blend of traditional pedagogical teaching methods and electronic learning put into an effective use can pave way for a newer and unique teaching and learning process. This blend attains its effectiveness only when

1. The teacher is well versed in using media and technology
2. Understands the needs / requirements of their students
3. Is able to choose the appropriate tools required to attain the desired objective and when students
4. Do not get influenced by the negative impact (sms / email lingo) and instead
5. make a sincere, conscious and consistent effort in acquiring the language.

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