

## **REPOSITIONING TEACHING LEARNING ATTITUDES IN INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS AS AN APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTION IN EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Technological interventions for better educational outcomes are well considered notions in the present educational contexts. While teacher training and provision of technological services affirm the ushering in of change, the rural contexts continue to have apprehensions of learning English coupled with the use of technology. Incremental changes requiring far greater adjustments in teaching and learning attitudes are required to formulate an approach to bring in technological intervention. "Technology, when entering the institutional settings of an educational domain, triggers changes in teaching and learning practices (Gill 2009). A contextual approach would act as a motivational strategy to begin the use of devices in the classroom. It is important to identify and investigate factors that play an influential role in technology adoption and capacity building of teachers. Contextual cues can provide language cues which will create opportunities for teaching practices to change for the accommodation of technological intervention. A contextual approach can be initiated by starting with a survey of the needs of learners regarding use of computers and smartphones. Such a survey would also guide a proposal for the capacity building of teachers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Let us see an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student in a rural school, who needs to learn English as a second language- the lingua franca promising global job opportunities and global citizenship. And, the digital literacy as the latest technology which promises to increase opportunities for higher education and employment at an exponential rate. Equity and access to global citizenship are the goals of education for which the rural student needs to find paths with the help of the classroom teacher, the one person whom the learner can trust with equipping the required skills. The trust and guidance that the learner expects from the teacher means that “teachers are being recognized as the centerpiece of educational change; active and powerful change agents who have the power to make a difference, both individually and collectively. (Castellano & Datnow. 2000)

### **Learner attitude**

The notion of attitude towards learning English in the rural contexts is a variable that needs to be discussed. For most learners, it is a language to be learnt as per the curriculum. The immediate need and applicability is far from viable. The learner wonders, “why do I need to learn English when nobody at home has learnt it. The vegetable market and the kirana (grocery), the butler and the barber’s shops use the regional language. The English teacher also speaks in the regional language in the English classroom because most of us cannot understand English.

When we come to digital literacy, the learner wonders, “Why do I need to learn English on a mobile phone? It is not easy to read on the small screen. I have to keep asking my father for the phone and he keeps complaining about the cost of frequent recharges because I use the internet for learning English.

Further, the wondering does not cease. When will I and will I ever go to a town or city where only English is spoken? Will I be able to get a job where English proficiency is required?

The teacher is the competent person to address the learner’s misgivings. The teacher is knowledgeable about the global use and presence of English as well as its absence in the home environment of the learner. Ashton Selly & Selma Elydirium (2006) say that “attitudes can be modified by experience, affective language teaching strategies can encourage students to be more positive towards the language they are learning.”

The teacher can hold the learner’s thoughts and begin to make the learner start believing in a job, in the town, where English would be required and the use of technology for the future jobs. The teacher’s positive attitude helps in turning student’s dismay with English learning and learning with technology as an exciting path into a hope filled future. The teacher helps in raising student awareness related to healthy uses of technology contributing to the overall positive life for

students. Rural learners need to be sensitized to use opportunities to employ new technologies that are deemed important for future economic productivity.” (ITU 2018b) “Attitude in conjunction with action, are critical change factors” (Kennedy, C. & Kennedy, J. 1996) Rural students need to be sensitized to use opportunities to employ new technologies that are deemed important for future productivity. Learning environments can be created with a focus on learner’s future needs which envisage changes in curriculum, training teachers to meet the everchanging needs of society. Peterson (2011) points out the need for more research to find ways to support rural writing development in middle years and high school (Barter, 2013).

### **Education in rural schools**

Five start-ups working to enhance education in rural schools in India, observed on International Literacy Day 2021, that “education in rural regions continues to lag due to factors such as poor educational quality, ineffective teaching methods, and a lack of inappropriate infrastructure and resources, among others.” However, the recent rise in digital literacy have raised awareness of second language learning through technological intervention. With the collaboration of government’s efforts and enterprising startups, access has expanded, digital infrastructure is improving and the digital divide between rural and urban is narrowing. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to recall what ITU 2018b observed that “available data suggest that digital inequalities are not a generational thing and will persist into the future. (p.13) In 2019, a UNICEF report said that “the most pressing challenges of working in the field were also investigated, revealing the following most important issues: teachers’ lack of capacity, problems with connectivity and infrastructure, and the limited understanding by governments of digital literacy issues.”(p.6) Kara et al (2018) say that “there is minimal research on how the teachers’ professional development impacts their thinking about literacy and their pedagogies, especially in relation to new literacies and media literacy.”(p.3) In their discussion, they say that “none of the teachers in Graham’s(2008) study extended their personal digital literacies into the classroom.”(p.3). It was further noticed that “Kellinger (2012) studied teachers who use the tools of new literacies in their classrooms yet may not embrace digital literacy as a social phenomenon, neither in the classroom nor in their lives outside of school.(p.3)

Kara et al(2018) elaborate that “in a survey on the influence of literacy tools on classroom activities( frequencies), the authors found “an interesting disconnect over the number of teachers reporting electronic devices used at home as compared to those same devices used at school for teaching purposes. Teachers who frequently use electronic devices at home use them at a much lower frequency in school. The findings of the survey raise questions about why teachers rarely use digital literacy devices for teaching or work related activities, and why more up to date or innovative technologies are not being used for the same purposes.”(p.15)

It is pertinent to remember what Gill(2009) said:” Technology, when entering the institutional settings of an educational domain, triggers changes in teaching and learning practices.” So, what would be the changes in a rural school’s teaching and learning practices with the intervention of technology? With reference to attitude, according to Ellis(1992)attitude is a set of beliefs among learners of their teachers and the learning task tht they are given. According to Khasinah Siti(2014,p,259),”it is obvious that learners who have positive attitudes learn more, but also learners who learn well acquire positive attitudes.”

### **Teachers’ attitude towards language teaching and technological intervention**

Technological interventions for better educational outcomes and greater learning impact are well considered notions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational contexts. However, the rural Indian setting brimming with apprehensions of learning English coupled with the use of technology is a formidable challenge for the teacher. The challenge is broadly met with several top down approaches like teacher training and provision of technological services. But incremental changes requiring far greater adjustments in managing classroom teaching methods, materials, time is necessary. Behavioural change among teachers is a much sought after aspect. Such a change would initiate new teaching practices such as adapting oneself to new ways of teaching with different materials like authentic ones, apart from printed text. The teacher’s initiation, focus will act as an example to learners for them to usher in behavioral change. Teachers can modify their attitudes as well as the learners’ “by experience, effective language teaching strategies can encourage students to be more positive towards the language they are learning.”(Ashton, Selly,2006,p.2)

To quote Durrant & Green,(2000,p.95),”Just how do we go about shifting our strategies for teaching more or less print bound literacy to helping our students meet the fresh demands and challenges of literacies that spring from living in such technological and seamless’new times’?”

An increased awareness of globalization has resulted in the need to develop digital literacy among rural learners which is good as it tries to converge into the goals of universal education for all. The global village, the digital citizen and life long learning are the three concepts which profess equity, access to geographically distant population with an overpowering sense of knowledge held by the hand and seen by the eye. The held and seen object, the technological device-the computer or the mobile phone,for example-promise seamless learning over a lifetime. The global village concept has erased the geographical boundary called rural. To inhabit a world that is a village is expressive of the need for mankind to be simple in living and high in thinking. This is the dream of living in a global village. To be the digital citizen of a global village is the emergent concern of being and staying connected through technology and all development that surrounds its use.

The concept of lifelong learning establishes the twin goals of a global village and digital citizen as a person's age and place of stay become irrelevant and there is a oneness among the human population for achieving these goals with the advantage of a lifetime. In the unfolding of the dream of the new world with the three concepts, several scenes of context, culture, social practices and attitudes come to the fore which arouse conflict first. However, it is required to be understood that the three notions need to be facilitated by pedagogic and technological interventions in any diverse society with differing cultural contexts, a variety of social practices and a heterogeneity of attitudes as a consequence.

As we absorb the three concepts gradually, we are preparing ourselves to step into a new socio-cultural, cognitive, technological, age defying existence with a global address for all stakeholders being CHANGE – as noun and verb with its profound ubiquity.

Arguably, it is a dream cherished by all. As it filters through the prisms of developed and developing economies, multilingual or bilingual communities, institutional and instructional contexts, teacher and learner attitudes are underlined by certain dichotomies. Challenges such as urban rural divide, digital divide, gender and ethnic discrimination cast shadows on the dream. Similarly, the reluctance to change in terms of teaching and learning practices is a dominant challenge to be grappled with.

Living in a paradoxical situation where English language, the lingua franca, and digital literacy vouch to open several opportunities for higher education and better employment, the rural learner and teacher remain in a state of resistance to change, not giving oneself to the power of change. With an abundance of theoretical approaches to language learning, the provision of internet to education by the Government of India's "Digital India" initiative, the rural learner is embedded in the bilingual environment with a non English background and cultural practices which do not bring the learner near the target language except through the English teacher and the classroom.

### **The role of the teacher**

The teacher, trying her best to bring better outcomes is equipped with technology, in the form of a single computer in her school or a smartphone in her hand. The teacher has to be trained in the use of online tools to improve learning outcomes. The teacher could be doing self paced learning by herself, identifying the right level of materials, choosing the effective exercises and gradually introducing them to the learners. The approach of the teacher is important in that she has to learn to use the technical skill to teach language to her learners.

Therefore, a curious, bold approach to learn technology and a soft, understanding attitude towards the learners would lead to better learning outcomes. Behaviour change in teacher personality would effect personal as well as professional development.

Kundu & Kedarnath (2018) say that “India is developing as a knowledge economy and it cannot function without the support of ICT.” Hence, the teacher needs to find extra time outside the timetable to make the lesson delivery happen with the support of ICT. A slow, steady approach, taking simple exercises of short duration, will acclimatize the teacher to the use of technology which will enable her to build the comfort zone for the learner. A caring and supportive teacher can make the learners feel comfortable through the learning process. The teacher can encourage learners to produce small, short, quick responses. Plenty of opportunities to read aloud in the classroom may be provided to improve pronunciation, diction and intonation. A one to one interaction with every learner establishes better communication and fortifies the teaching learning context for satisfactory learning outcomes. Teacher’s tolerance of errors increases the affective filter(Krashen,1981)) thereby effecting learning. Teachers indulging in small talk with the learners, keeps the children bound to learning as the sense of relaxation keeps the learner’s attitudes open and absorbent.

The teacher would need to keep a half hour everyday for browsing at home to select suitable sites, webpages, exercises for the learners. She would have to download and save them for use in the classroom. This small investment in time by the teacher would build consistent effort in integrating ICT to teach ESL.

Some simple assessment tasks could be selected for quick use in the classroom. The teacher and learners would soon realise the abundant support from ICT in selection of materials and choice of assessment tasks. This will in turn actually reduce time needed for correction and feedback. The instant support of ICT would be a motivator for greater use of ICT in ESL.

Within a month’s regular use of ICT in classroom, the ease of using technology would overtake the lack of enthusiasm for learning ESL and adapting to technology. According to Huang & Liaw (2005), “the successful implementation of the technology depends on teachers having a positive attitude towards it.” Zhao et al (2008) in their studies also emphasized on the teachers’ attitudes and willingness to embrace the technology for the success of students’ learning using ICT. Therefore, teachers’ knowledge, understanding and attitudes must also align with current economic needs in order to produce a workforce that meets the demands of globalization today.”(in Abd Rahman et al,2018)

The teacher needs to be approachable and friendly for learners to overcome their shyness in learning English as well as hesitation in adapting technology. The teacher can try to sensitize learners to English and technology through tolerance of errors. If a teacher is passionate about her profession, it will help overcome all shortcomings such as inadequate resources, insufficient salary more work, shy and reluctant learners. The teacher’s role is important in trying to bring learners to a satisfactory level of linguistic and technical competence. The teacher can encourage the

practice of sharing minimal resources by learners to build awareness of the need to learn the global language as well as technology for educational purposes. The teacher can provide information regarding simple language tasks sites to the learners. She can guide learners to interactive exercises. Keeping track of learners' efforts and appreciating often will improve the bond of teacher and learners. The teacher needs to constantly think of creating ease in the classroom for learners to use language and technology.

The teacher needs to cultivate enormous patience to be ready to listen to the problems learners faced in the use of ICT. Understanding the difficulty of every learner and going back to the problem the next day and later helps in learners gaining confidence with the teacher's helpful attitude. It can be stated that the teacher has to mould her personality to be a caring, concerned, curious, persevering, patient facilitator in ensuring that learners reach the comfort level in using English and gaining competence in use of technology. The teacher becomes a catalyst. She moves out of the constraints of syllabus completion, insufficient time, lack of infrastructure for ICT, students' reluctance to learn and use English and technology. These suggestions are being made assuming that the teacher is quite alone, has no time for collaboration. Reflection on practice, curiosity and the passion to change, adapt, facilitate, monitor, guide, counsel and teach could be the motivating concerns for the teacher's behavioral change. It may not always be possible for teachers to be updated with the use of online tools on a day to day basis. Without feeling burdened, the teachers can take up the challenge of teaching English and ICT skills to learn the same along with the rural learners. The learners too could become apprehensive with a well trained teacher in technology if she is not caring and patient. A sympathetic teacher leveraging technology to foster language development would be the new teacher that will help the rural learner. Technological tools have to be user friendly to the teacher as well as the learner. The repertoire of the teacher is the determination to keep learning to teach the younger generation, to equip oneself and the learners with required skills, to overcome the challenges of constant change which creates new learning environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

The technological tool is the new textbook and the support offered by teachers in the initial stage results in motivation and remote learning by the learner. Using technology is definitely a feature of professional concern and development. However, the fine balance between the friendly face of the teacher in the classroom and that of the visual media has its distinguishing features. Many of us like to look at film stars, sport stars, Olympians in live though we see them a lot on television and films. In the same way, the teacher's celebrity status is that of the learner being able to see the teacher face-to-face, live, in action with the drama of sharing knowledge and competencies. "Teachers want the best for their young people and use new technologies in their lessons. But the delivery of this new technology and learning models is just as important-if not more important than the technology itself."(Wright, Pamela, 2013).

Teachers would understand that ESL& ICT has created a 21<sup>st</sup> century digital world, and they need to teach the new generation of learners to be successful, global, digital citizens. Digital literacy is a lot about self directed learning. It is a process which is preparing the teachers and learners for a change. The lingua franca and digital literacy have the potential to improve life long learning which is a relieving feature for all rural learners and teachers.

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