

Technological Mediation and Learner-centred English language Learning

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Technological mediation has been the immediate outcome of globalization in almost every domain. It is responsible for the radical transformation of the very basis of every field of study including aesthetics, which seemed to have been the most unaffected domain. However globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations (Giddens 1990) continues to exert a striking influence on many aspects including pedagogy around the world. The impact of globalisation and technological mediation in the field of pedagogy can be evinced in almost every field of study amidst growing contempt among the purists. Language learning, especially English, which is not the L1 or mother tongue of most of the people belonging to South Asian countries, has transformed over the years. Inclusion or intrusion, according to purists, of technology has been found to be highly beneficial for basic and advanced learning in certain areas. The platform provided by technology for the smooth dissemination of academic courses in and beyond the curriculum has been found versatile in true sense. The accessibility of technology, which has pervaded social strata, is one of the strong reasons for its wide acceptance.

The entire mode of dissemination of English Language Learning (ELL) has transformed over the years. The earlier learner-centred pedagogy has changed to learner-centred pedagogy. Learner-centredness has been a significant and enduring concept influencing theory and practice over the last three decades or so in pedagogy. Brindley (1984: 15) says, “The learner should be seen as being at the centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher this means that instructional programme should be centred on learners’ needs and the learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility.” In order to permeate the cognitive wall of today’s learners, contemporary teaching tools are at ready help. Learning through contemporary tools like Smart Board in the classrooms, virtual classroom, webinars, video conferencing, teaching with the help of Power Point presentations, online assistance and many more are some of the popular ways how pedagogues reach their pupils. However, the extent of technological support to be provided to the learners is usually decided by the pedagogue or the curriculum designer. Cynthia White (2006: 322) states, “I have identified four key interpretations which have guided and characterized the actualized practices of learner-centred language teaching, they are learner-centredness as relevance, as responsiveness, as commitment to knowledge construction and as a prevailing culture of enquiry.” According to White (2006:322), learner-centredness as relevance means that the learners’ needs are identified and considered by pedagogues according to the broader goals and contexts for applying their language skills. The second interpretation, learner-centredness as responsiveness, focuses on the ways in which teachers are responsive to aspects of individual learners— their background, interests, experiences, perspectives, beliefs, strategies, styles; teaching, it is argued, should take account of these aspects, and build on what learners contribute. Two further points are that pedagogues need to be flexible and adaptable, to be aware of different opportunities and options in terms of methodologies, materials, and activities, and need to be able to take part in different degrees of negotiation with learners as appropriate. The third interpretation, learner-centredness as commitment by the

¹ Language 1 or first language

pedagogues to knowledge construction by the learner, can be seen as part of a wider rejection of pedagogue-centred, transmission approaches in pedagogy. Drawing on the constructive notion that learners must make sense of new language and experiences in the context of their unique world view, teaching should create and sustain personally meaningful connections between language content and the lived experiences and world of each learner. In the fourth interpretation, learner-centredness as a prevailing culture of enquiry, learners and teachers are seen as involved in parallel processes of ongoing learning. The active learning of teachers alongside students in teaching-learning processes is emphasized. One aspect of this is that pedagogues, ideally, model enquiry processes in all aspects of their practice and in their reflection on practice. In the Indian context however, another crucial aspect of learner-centredness mode of pedagogy-learner-centredness is the response to the immediate socio-cultural contexts. India— a country with wide and diverse culture, society, language, class, clan etc, offers heterogeneous and complex challenges in terms of pedagogy which is left unmet quite often. As such, the need of the hour directs the steering of learner-centredness pedagogy while considering these aspects and mode of teaching towards inexhaustible dynamism and flexibility. In this context Oller & Richards (1973) state that “a greater appreciation of the fact that the ordinary classroom teacher is daily performing experimental research...”

It is nonetheless a formidable task to implement an absolute process of learner-centred pedagogy taking into consideration the complexities all around, especially the heterogeneous scenario of India. For example, implementing common or uniform pedagogic pattern in all over India would hardly serve the purpose of meeting tailored needs in the different parts of the geographical corners often conditioned to diverse socio-cultural aspects. Also, in the push to the online global delivery, learners' views are hardly considered. An indelible gulf of understanding in the learners develops quite often during the ongoing process of virtual teaching due to the limitation of immediate feedback or response. As a result virtual teaching resembles mechanical/robotic pedagogy. In fact, consideration needs to be given to the various cultural borders which must be crossed in order to make learning meaningful within learners' immediate environment: there is the culture of the content being learnt and the cultural framework through which it is presented, the native culture or the culture of the immediate environment of the learner and the culture of the use of technology and of the particular communications technology. Taken together, these borders present a complex topography for the learners to navigate. Inevitable apprehension arises between claims about the quality and value of global online learning opportunities, and the degree to which institutions and teachers enable access to those opportunities through their responsiveness to learners in their particular social, cultural and academic surroundings with globalisation the development of social networks places demands on individuals to be able to learn about, meet and adjust to the interactive demands of participation in virtual contexts and communities. A recurrent finding in telecollaborative projects has been that intercultural understanding does not necessarily emerge from interaction, no more face-to-face settings.

Contemporary learning and technological mediation seem to complement each other. Learning — classroom or virtual, has been learner centred as discussed above. Academic capsules or so-called packages/courses target learners' immediate and long term requirements. Dissemination of core subjects like literature, art, engineering, management etc has been successfully conducted with the help of technology. Contemporary learners are familiar with the modules to be taught, and are conditioned to the mode of swift and rapid learning process. They are brought up in an academic environment where technology complements human pedagogues. Syllabuses in the educational institution get modified with the changing technology, and this process is rapid in the present milieu. Smart Board in the classroom was beyond one's dream even five years back and it is difficult to predict the following technological explosion down the years that would permeate in every sphere of learning.

Increasing penchant for English language learning among Indians due to the high demand of the language in the professional arena has led learners opt for modern means of learning. The challenges of language learning, especially English, have been

facilitated by technology supported pedagogic tools, like mode of online/offline self-evaluation, aids to correct English accent/pronunciation, syntactic and semantic aids etc. Virtual classrooms also have been found useful in the dissemination of English language learning. However technology has not been a ready help for beginners of language learning in the remote rural areas where basic human needs are yet to be fulfilled. Even special technologically mediated basic courses designed for the deprived pupils have been found unsuccessful among these learners. In fact, this failure, to a large extent, confirms the need of 'chalk and talk' mode of traditional pedagogy in the remote areas where human resources although plenty, technological mediation seems to be scanty. In fact, learning through human interference succeeds in these areas more than sophisticated pedagogic tools, and herein technology needs to explore to reach these learners whose L1 (not English) interference often act as hindrance to smooth learning of English.

However impact of technology-mediated pedagogy in the global surrounding invites complex issues while teaching language. Language is quite volatile in many respects. Many times meeting the ever changing needs and demands of the learners (belonging to different places, linguistic background and social class) become a herculean burden for a pedagogue to meet. For example, frequent interference of popular language patterns of a particular language while learning English, becomes a matter of worry for a pedagogue. It is difficult to convince the learners regarding the acceptability of the present day usage of language without any strong philological or linguistic lineage. To accept the day to day inclusion of popular phrases in the cognitive dictionary of people, much triggered by the media, poses serious threat to a teacher of language especially. Wide use of sms language, smileys, distorted and mixed up spelling errors are again stumbling blocks for a smooth process of teaching language. As such strategies for learner-centred pedagogy has to be framed keeping in mind the complexities all around much mediated by the socio-cultural aspects.

The support provided by technology, however, cripples human power of exploration at times. The aim of the facilitator is to develop skills and appropriate knowledge among trainees for using and integrating the correct technology in an appropriate manner. It is important for the teacher/facilitator/pedagogue to be familiar with the technological tools used in the classroom. One must ensure technological integration since technology by itself will not lead to change. Rather, it is the way in which teachers integrate technology, which has the potential to bring change in education. Hence, attitude and self-efficacy towards technology play an important role. For facilitators and teachers to become fluent in the usage of educational technology means going beyond mere competence with the latest tools to developing an understanding of the complex web of relationships among users, technologies, practices, and tools. Teachers must understand their role in technologically-oriented classrooms. Thus, knowledge about technology is important in itself, but not as a separate and unrelated body of knowledge divorced from the context of teaching--it is not only about what technology can do, but perhaps what technology can do for them as teachers.

In techno-pedagogy, there are three areas of knowledge, namely: content, pedagogy, and technology.

Content (C) is the subject matter that is to be taught.

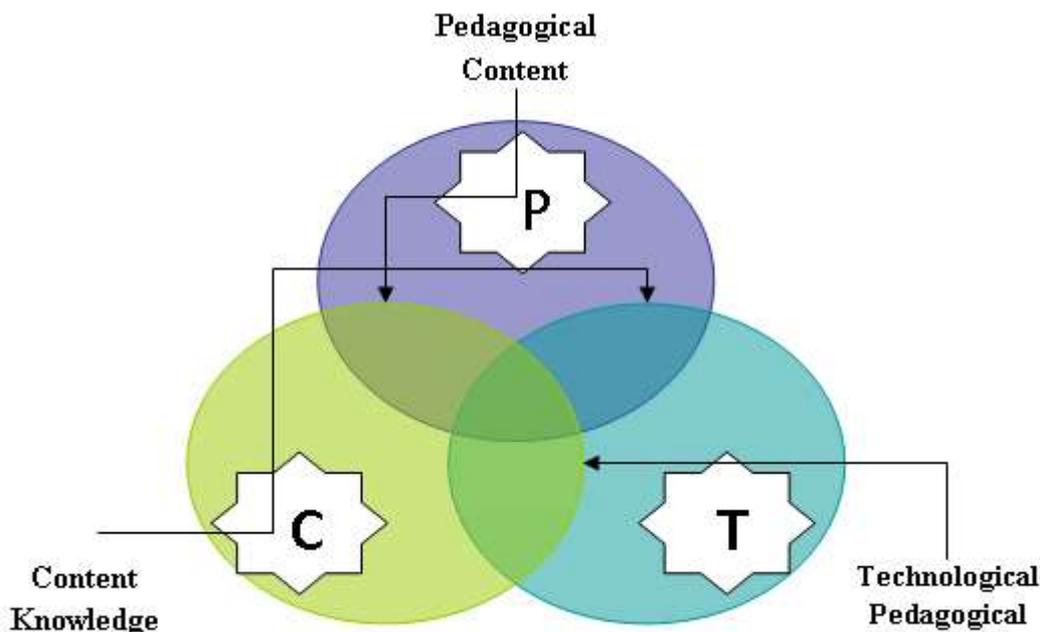
Technology (T) encompasses modern technologies such as computer, Internet, digital video and commonplace technologies including overhead projectors, blackboards, and books.

Pedagogy (P) describes the collected practices, processes, strategies, procedures, and methods of teaching and learning. It also includes knowledge about the aims of instruction, assessment, and student learning.

Technological integration entails the understanding and negotiating of the relationships among the aforementioned three components. Good teaching is not simply adding technology to the existing teaching and content domain. Rather, the introduction of technology causes the representation of new concepts and requires developing sensitivity to the dynamic,

transactional relationship between all three components suggested by the TPCK2 framework. (Koehler, M. J. and Mishap, P. 2005)

Depending upon the nature of content, scope of content, and level of students, appropriate technology integration must be sought. Technology as an aid enhances the process of learning and helps in achieving higher level objectives.



The objective of techno-education is not to prepare technocrats, but to disseminate effective education with minimum hindrances. It is therefore important to develop techno-pedagogues. Pedagogues should be in a position to integrate technology into teaching / learning as well as develop the art and skill of webogogy³. So, objectives must be set at the attainment of application and skill levels rather than just at the knowledge and understanding levels. The professional development of teachers/facilitators/pedagogues need to be given importance. There must be congruence between the academic curriculum and training offered to the teachers/facilitators/pedagogues at a particular level of study. Otherwise, they would not be in a position to utilize their knowledge in order to effectively design teaching/learning processes, project work, and assignments. In addition to offering ICT as a compulsory and special course, integrated approaches need to be studied along with methods courses. This will help learner teachers to develop the concept of ‘techno pedagogy’ to a greater extent.

The significance and impact of globalization is the subject of much debated and controversy (Block & Cameron 2002; Altbach 2004), as human interaction and the development of social networks expand, intensify and become progressively more complex across all domains of human activity. In terms of language, the demands of a globalised information society are not as yet entirely understood; however we do not know that such a society entails being able to process large amounts of rapidly changing information, and being able to meet the interactive demands of participation in the remote communities. International learners are required to participate in virtual and global contexts and communities mediated by writing. In some academic institutes many courses aim to build online learning communities among the students from often heterogeneous linguistic and cultural

² Technology Pedagogic Content Knowledge

³ To make use of Internet technology, exploring it, accessing information from it to use in teaching learning, etc

background. Experience shows that participation, interaction, intercultural communication online may be problematic, with evident tensions between the expectations, positions and practices of different participants.

Planners and administrators have to provide academic leadership to prepare reflective pedagogues/teachers who can manage the educational system efficiently at various stages of education at the pre-primary, primary, elementary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. Effective change in educational institutes is possible only when there are corresponding changes in the management of teacher/pedagogue education programmes. Wise implementation of technology in pedagogy and its mediation with human power (teachers/facilitators/pedagogues) is the need of the hour to ensure better education.

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