Technical Writing With Technology: A Study Aiming at the Students of Tertiary Level

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ABSTRACT *The paper aims at analysing the possibility of using technology in improving the writing skill of the students at the tertiary level. In this era of international communication and advanced technology, there is a need for engineers and technical professionals to convey technical information in English for various purposes. Therefore, besides learning English as an international language, engineering students need to be equipped with adequate technical writing ability to effectively communicate technical information without any ambiguity. This advancement in communication calls for a change in the teaching modes as well. For the enhancement of quality in higher education, a totally novel methodology, which is modern and effective, will gain an enormous response. While considering these demands, using Computer, Multimedia Technologies and Blogs seem to be the best way, which would definitely promote qualitative interaction amongst students, teachers and computer software. As technology and computers are becoming integral parts of our life and education, these principles would make it possible to learn a foreign language in a realistic communicative setting. Teachers, as Internet users need to attain a minimum level of technical knowledge and skills and must act as learners as well as professionals. This paper focuses on the different methodologies in improving the writing skill of the students at the university level, highlighting the possibility and the employability of technology in the classroom.*

Introduction

Learning to represent or write effectively will prepare students for success both in the classroom and the outside world. Being able to express oneself well in writing can be a great source of power. Writing in English is not as easy as speaking in English. It requires appropriate grammar, sentence formation as well as suitable lexis in order to make the reader understand. The knowledge and innovation age has presented new challenges and opportunities for language teachers and learners.

Using Technology in Teaching

A rich language environment is the foundation for good writing. "The best path toward good written communication is first to absorb the principles of clear and readable writing." (Gunning, 32) Students need to be personally involved in writing exercises in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. Language teaching must adapt to the use of technology. The use of Technology enables not only student-centered learning but also accommodates a variety of learning styles

Need for Professional Development of Teachers

Teachers as Internet users can employ various tools to make their way around the Internet to extract useful information. They need to attain a minimum level of technical knowledge and skills. Moreover they should act as learners as well as professionals. It will enhance their ability to conceive Internet-based projects and to solve the inevitable problems that appear. Some teachers are satisfied with what they have done, doing a reasonable job but not developing to any great extent. Some others strive to push their boundaries and actively create challenges for themselves, learning from their experiences and adding to their skills.

Web 2.0 tools

The growth of Web 2.0 technologies has made it possible for teachers to create a variety of online learning activities for students. This can easily be used by English teachers, who are interested in using technology in the classrooms. A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue. Examples of Web 2.0 include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, web applications, etc., Web 2.0 websites allow users to do more than just retrieve information. The users are provided with more software and storage facilities. This is usage of network as a platform can provide the data that is on a Web 2.0 site and the user can have some control over that data.

Blogs

Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary from various users, descriptions of events, or other material. Most blogs are interactive and allows visitors to leave comments or messages. Using the discussion thread as a writing tool has lot of benefits. It provides the history of the conversation. Students can review these threads for insight into issues they are resolving. They can ask questions to their peers, and they can review samples that others post. Teachers also can review the contribution of the students in a particular thread.

Blogs for Assignments

Students should be given more opportunity to write. "Writing allows students to order and evaluate their ideas. The more your students practice writing, the more they practice thinking." (Clyde, 129) At the same time making the students write just for the sake of thinking is very difficult. If the students are awarded with grades, they may be encouraged in involving themselves in writing. When the teachers assign work to the students, they must take time to correct and discuss the assignments. Collecting the piles of papers and returning them is a tedious job on the part of a teacher; whereas technology comes handy here, it is easy to handle and faster. This also helps the fellow students. Students get an idea of what their peers are doing. They can peruse their friend's assignments, which in turn would give them more exposure. They will be able to apply the skills that they learnt while they evaluate some-

one else's work. Students would also get more feedback.

Blogs for Tough-topics.

Students may have the same kind of questions every semester. It would be very much useful if the answers to those questions are recorded. Posting them on blogs would benefit the students as well as the teacher. Comments from the student blogs may be used to refine the teachers' explanation over time and to clearly understand the reason for the students' difficulty on a particular topic. Before students come to the teacher for help, they may be asked to visit the blogs to see if the answer lies there.

Improving vocabulary - with technology

Most of the English language learners have a limited vocabulary. They repeat the same words and phrases again and again. A lack of vocabulary makes writing a difficult, tedious and sometimes impossible task. Mark Twain says, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."

Communicate with native speakers

To improve vocabulary the students may be encouraged to join and post in forums, especially in educational websites, which would be very educational and informative. There one can find English-speaking pen friends, who are called e-Pals on the Internet. Chatting with people, who are native English speakers, through these kinds of blogs, will also help in a great deal. According to British council-think articles, 69% of learners around the world said that they learned most effectively when socializing informally.

Free rice

The following website could help one with one's vocabulary and also will get free food for starving people. The food is donated from just using the website http://www.freerice.com. From the options tab one can set for it to start out with the easy words. It is great because if one gets words wrong, it tells the right answer and moves on and then about three or four words later it will ask again. It gives the users many a chances, until they get it right.

Using an on-line dictionary

When a learner doesn't know the meaning of a word that he encountered, an English online dictionary can be used. Many online dictionaries now contain audio files with English pronunciation. Students may use one of these, where they can even find the meaning of the word, the pronunciation as well as application.

Conclusion

As our current world has entered the era of international communication and advanced technology, there are more and more chances for engineers and technical professionals to convey technical information in English for various purposes. When 'Fortune' magazine reporters spoke to successful corporate executives about business training, executives responded with disappointment, "Teach them to write better" (Penrose 5). The plea was not on the ability to do fancy writing, rather fundamental writing, with clarity and precision. As instructors, it is our duty not only to teach the next generation what we know, but also to adopt new methods of instruction, which are more appropriate to the context in which we are living. As technology and computers are becoming integral parts of our life and education, these principles would make it possible to learn a foreign language in a realistic communicative setting.

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