ABSTRACT

ROLE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IN ENHANCING
THE ACQUIRING OF LISTENING SKILLS

This study comprises of five chapters as follows:

I] CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Change is the essence of life. Computers are indispensable today as we have entered the Digital age and are living in an information technology society. In today's fast paced technology driven world it is necessary to keep track of the latest technologies and make full use of them whichever field we are in. Effective communication in English is absolutely mandatory for success in today's intensely competitive world. An individual's personal, professional and social achievements may be hindered by lack of good communication skills in English, a global language. Appropriate and effective use of English language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing is crucial for overall development and good communication. Covering all the four language skills in one thesis would make the research work too extensive hence the listening skill has been dealt with in this work.

PROBLEM:

In India there is paucity of good English speakers and especially in the rural areas there are no good role models for students to imitate. In schools here, there is a ratio of 1 teacher to 60 students. The chalk and talk method is prevalent where the student is a passive recipient whereas the teacher plays the dominant role. How effective is the teaching/learning in this scenario? How can the boredom of a normal classroom be alleviated to make learning more interesting? Is there an alternative, an aide that would assist the teacher and make the work easier and more effective? How can the computer be of help to a language teacher? Why is the computer not an integral part of a language class whereas its use in other fields is indispensable?

Role of Computer Technology in English Language Teaching:

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1] The listening skill is neglected in English language teaching-learning but it is an important skill for language acquisition.
2] Varied computer technologies can motivate the students as the learning becomes interesting and with proper guidance from the teacher the student can become an independent self learner who can learn at his/her own pace.
3] Acquiring of the listening skill can be enhanced with the help of computer technologies especially the internet.

PLACE OF RESEARCH

Al Jamea Tus Satifiyah, Arabic Academy, Surat. The students studying here come from all over India and various other countries. They are admitted to Std 1 here, after they complete STD VII of a normal school. It is a heterogeneous group of students who have studied English from different schools; in different states of India. It can stand for any part of India or any school in India which teaches English as an ESL. The research group for this study consists of female students only.

Definitions of terms related to the research work have been given in chapter-1.

II] CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the critical issue of incorporating technology into the school classroom and what experts have stated. Technology has brought about changes in all major aspects of life, be it offices, homes, hospitals, prisons, business. But schools do not seem to have embraced technological advancements as enthusiastically as is obvious in all other aspects of life. Someone awakening from a 50 year nap in a school will find that s/he has been asleep for a few years at the most. There is the same scene, teacher in front of the class dispensing knowledge and students passively sitting in rows of desks. But when this Rip Van Winkle walks out of the school, he is stunned. He sees people talking on cellular phones; using PDA’s accessing information on the
go. Thus there is a great digital divide between life outside and life inside a school classroom.

The teaching learning process has been dominated by the teachers who are considered as the fountain head of information and the students are passive recipients. But for wholesome learning to take place it is essential that the students become an active part of the learning. The need of the day is to adopt a fusion approach which takes the best of teacher centered as well as student centered approaches. In the fusion classroom, the teacher is a coach and mentor, a support person who troubleshoots and problem solves when students need such help.

Listening is an important skill in English language learning as is evident from L1 acquisition. But it is considered as the Cinderella skill and is fairly neglected as it is difficult to teach listening. This difficulty can be overcome by using computer technology to help in the acquisition of the listening skill as it has the following advantages:

The computer can be the teacher’s tool/aide. It is a tireless worker doing mundane, tedious tasks such as repetitions tirelessly as innumerable repetitions are possible. It can therefore, help to overcome human limitations. It makes learning interesting and enjoyable. Thus helping to alleviate the boredom of a normal classroom. It is learner centered enabling the student to learn at his/her own pace while the teacher co-ordinates and orchestrates the learning.

**Computer assisted listening:** There is a plethora of listening materials available on CD’s, VCDs and DVDs. Also on the internet there is a vast amount of listening material that can be accessed absolutely 'free' of cost. Listening with computer assisted technologies involves other skills like listening + reading + visualizing [pictures/animations]. Thus the learning is more effective as more senses are involved. There is uniformity in the listening.
The material is authentic as it is from sources like British Council, BBC, and Oxford talking dictionary. The American Storyteller, The Karadi Tales and many more. An exhaustive list of resources available for listening skill on the internet has been compiled and attached to the thesis in the form of a CD-ROM.

**III] CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

1. Questionnaire
2. Administering a Pre Test and a Post Test.

The Pretest was administered on a sample group of a 100 students, all females, studying at the *Al-Jamea-Tus-Saifiyah Arabic academy* in Surat where the researcher teaches English. The noticeable feature of the institute is that students are admitted to class 1 here after they have completed standard 7 of a normal school. Thus the students come from varied backgrounds having studied English in various regional schools of India and also abroad. The Pretest was administered to the students at the beginning of the study. The students were then put on a training program using computer assisted listening materials. The listening activities were conducted in the Audio-Visual Lab (known as Mamal). It has 3 sections as follows:

1] **Sanako Listening Lab:** SANAKO Lab 100 is a unique, teacher-led language teaching system. Students listened to texts on CDs which were a part of the syllabus and did the pre listening and post listening exercises given along with the text. After one initial listening with the entire class each student was able to listen to the same text individually and could listen to the previous sentence, going back and forth at the click of a button.

2] **Computer Lab:** this section of the A.V. lab has 30 individual computers with audio phones and a central computer for the teacher with a projector. All the computers had internet access and the students were allowed to use the internet facilities during class time under the guidance and supervision of the subject teacher. Text-to-speech software was installed on the teacher’s table.
This was used by the researcher for the reading of long texts and stories. The computerized voice read the text aloud, each word was highlighted as it was read, and this could be seen on the screen with the help of the projector. Students also used the Oxford talking dictionary and played online word games.

3] Multimedia Room: The researcher has used this facility to show the various resources like CDs related to English language learning available in the A.V. Lab. As multiple skills like listening-reading-visualization are involved learning becomes more effective.

Out of three English lectures each week, one lecture was reserved for computer assisted listening and a study module focusing on the use of computer assisted listening technologies was implemented on the research group. The modules of which in brief were as follows:

1. **Module 1** focused on words. The Oxford Talking Dictionary was used to enable the students to master the correct pronunciation of words.
2. **Module 2** focused on sentences. Various CD’s like the Rosetta Stone series and Learn to Speak English CD-ROMs were used. In addition material from the internet like Randall’s ESL Lab were also a part of this module
3. **Module 3** focused on listening to paragraphs. A text to speech system, 'Naturalsoft' was used in which paragraphs were scanned into the computer and these were read aloud by the computerized voice in the system. The text was seen on the screen which was highlighted word by word.

After a period of one academic year i.e. approximately seven months the Post test was administered as well as the questionnaire to glean the response of the students. The questionnaire was administered to the research group after they had completed the research study module incorporating computer assisted listening technologies. The questionnaire was used to ascertain the response of
the students to the new methodology that was used in their English classes especially for the listening skill.

**IV] CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The data obtained from the pre and post test was analyzed statistically and compiled using tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA OBTAINED FROM THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST:**

The comparative analysis of the pre test and post test scores shows that though the scores obtained in the pre-test are remarkably good, the data analysis shows that there is enhancement of the same in the post tests with a phenomenal increase in the overall percentage from 71% in the pre-test to 93% in the post-test.

When we carefully study the results, we can observe that in each and every section there is an increase in the scores in the post test as compared to the pre test scores.

So our hypothesis that computer technology helps in enhancing the acquiring of listening skills is ably established as seen from the results obtained from the administration of the pre and post test.

**QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS**

The responses given by the students after they had used the computer assisted listening technologies show that the students have accepted the same and have given extremely positive responses. The students have voiced the need for using computer assisted technologies for the listening skills. Maximum number of students have said that the repeated listening of texts and listening to words with the help of talking dictionaries helps to improve pronunciations as well as spellings as they can see the word as well as listen to it as many times as they want to. All the students have unanimously said that computer assisted technologies help in enhancing the acquiring of the listening skill.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Technology is an indispensable part of our lives and has many uses and advantages in the classroom. The results of the study show that computer technology can help in enhancing the acquisition of the listening skill. Teaching listening is easy with computer assisted technologies as the computer acts as the teacher's aide/assistant and helps the teacher to carry out the listening tasks. It does not diminish the importance of the teacher but on the contrary the students perceive the teacher to be advanced, tech savvy and in sync with the modern changing world. It alleviates the boredom of a normal classroom and as multiple skills are involved, learning is more effective.

Appropriate use of computer technology can enhance the teacher's teaching and make up for any shortcomings. The teacher's shortcoming can be overcome by using the text to speech software. In addition, listening to online stories and conversations would strengthen the English language skills of the listeners, be it the student or the teacher, it would benefit both. The students are more eager to learn, more co-operative and disciplined as they enjoy working with the computer. Computer assisted technologies use animations, sound, color and other advanced effects, this captures the students' attention and motivates them to learn so that the students "want" to learn instead of "have" to learn.

Repeated listening is very important for effective learning as is evident from the results of pre-test and post-test-section-1. But repeating over and over again different words for different students would tax the energies of a human teacher and if seen rationally, it is quite an impossible task. Thus the computer helps to overcome human limitations and performs tedious tasks effortlessly.

The computer has capabilities that combine the advantages of other A.V. aids and is far superior to them in functionality.

A plethora of listening resources on the internet are absolutely 'FREE' and one can access these anywhere, anytime as long as one has an internet connection.
**Teacher as a catalyst for change:** Teachers should adapt to and accept the change of role from sage on stage to that of a guide, a facilitator, focusing on learner centered modules. They should accept the computer as an aide/ tool which can perform tasks that can overcome human limitations. If the student is guided properly in the use of computer technology for his school subjects, it would act as a tutor at home and the student in time would become a completely independent learner and it would greatly reduce the compulsion that parents feel for keeping their wards for extra coaching.

**Teacher as a student:** Teachers must become familiar with using the Internet and its various functions such as e-mail. They must also learn how to use specific search tools in order to access information, search for lesson plans, or material and ideas to supplement their lessons. In essence, language teachers must take the plunge and approach the Internet as a learning experience themselves. The more enthusiastic and more knowledgeable language teachers are, the more successfully they can use the Internet in the language classroom. For the language learner, the Internet offers a world of information available to students at the click of a few keys. While it must be recognized that the Internet cannot replace the language classroom or the interaction between the language teacher and student, it offers a vast amount of information and lends itself to communication possibilities that can greatly enhance the language learning experience.

The future classroom as envisaged by the researcher will be one in which all students will work independently on Personal Computers and the teacher will play the role of a synchronizer who will meticulously plan the lessons to incorporate the correct technology application that would most benefit the students and during the class like in a symphony would orchestrate the proceedings to perfection. The teacher will try to design learning situations and activities that require student processing and application of course content in creative and original ways.
As advocated in this research, a fusion approach is the need of the hour which is a blend of good teaching techniques + a motivated learner + effective computer assisted technologies. This will change the dynamics of the school classroom and produce individuals who are fully competent and ready to face the future as they are equipped with all the relevant skills to become active participants of the fast evolving Information Society.

Further studies can be conducted to ascertain the use of computer technology for other skills of English language learning.