Competency crisis in language learning and role of technology - A study in the present curriculum of Higher education of Assam

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ABSTRACT: Higher education is considered throughout the world to be the key to both individual and societal development. The era of technology-oriented pedagogy in the second language teaching and learning has brought revolutionary changes in the realm of language acquisition around the world. Along with the computers the digital gadgets such as the CDs, DVDs, video, wireless communications are now widely used by educators as teaching aids in enhancing communication skills. It is very much encouraging that, especially, most of the technical education and other allied fields are availing the benefit of teaching language with technology. Since technology enhancement received its due attention, the government proceeded in the direction of establishment or permission to a number of technology institutions of higher learning. Mere prescription of few pieces of prose and poetry remain far away from acquiring competency in the English language skills. Since all the examinations assess the performance of the students in terms of their written examination many students fail to pass in the examination as they do not pick up any language skills from the classroom teaching. The normal classroom curriculum might fail to offer an integrated syllabus dealing with all the skills.
Key words: higher education, language competency, technology, Assam, syllabus, CALL etc.

Objectives of the paper:
The objective of this paper is to address some issues such as:
1. To examine the existing situation of language competency of the students at higher education institution of Assam.
2. To find out problems faced by the students and teachers in language learning situation.
3. To draw the attention of the concerned authority of syllabus making.
4. To make aware about the urgent needs of using technology in the institutions higher education of Assam.
5. To suggest strategies for improvement in language learning in students of higher education.

Hypothesis of the study:
The desired hypotheses of the study are as follows:
Hypothesis–1: The awareness of language competency students at higher education level.
Hypothesis–2: The effectiveness of language competency at higher education level.

Research Methodology:
This study is completely descriptive and based on secondary data collection. Secondary data were collected partly by Questionnaire and observations. Besides, some data were taken from the books, articles and journals. Target groups such Students from different institutions of higher education in the region will be the main sources of data.

I.   INTRODUCTION:
Higher education is considered throughout the world to be the key to both individual and societal development. The era of technology-oriented pedagogy in the second language teaching and learning has brought revolutionary changes in the realm of language acquisition around the world. Along with the computers the digital gadgets such as the CDs, DVDs, video, wireless communications are now widely used by educators as teaching aids in enhancing communication skills. [1] It is very much encouraging that, especially, most of the technical education and other allied fields are availing the benefit of teaching language with technology. Since technology enhancement received its due attention, the government proceeded in the direction of establishment or permission to a number of technology institutions of higher learning. It can be perceived that at present, more and more students are found

enrolling in the institutes of higher learning for pursuing their studies in technology-related subjects. But at the same time it is very depressing that just before enrolling in the higher learning a student has to through a bridge course where their language competency is not given due interest. In the recent times, an individual's capability is assessed in terms of the communication skill in English which is treated on par with the subject expertise of that particular profession.

This aspect throws light on the fact that an individual is expected to meet the challenges confronting the career aspects through a demonstration of strong English language skills. In this competitive world, there is every possibility that the modern man can get vulnerable to failures, disappointments and loss of wonderful opportunities due to a lack of communication skills. Particularly, the job scenario in this globalised world involves many dimensions of assessment in the form of competitive examinations and personal interviews; and, English serves as the medium of communication in these encounters. [3] Hence, the aspirants of progress in life in this technological era have to gear up with expected English language skills that cater to the various needs of their employment and advancement. Mere prescription of few pieces of prose and poetry remain far away from acquiring competency in the English language skills. Since all the examinations assess the performance of the students in terms of their written examination many students fail to pass in the examination as they do not pick up any language skills from the classroom teaching. In the absence of the right materials and methodology the students have been left helplessly failing to obtain the language skills. As language teaching involves attention towards every individual, the present day teacher finds it difficult in the class to impart instruction satisfactorily as the class is over-crowded.[2] Since teaching of a language is skill-oriented and involves adequate practice on the part of the learner, the English teacher faces the difficulty of not being able to give this practice in such packed classrooms. Most of the English courses do not specify the objectives of teaching that course clearly. Moreover certain unhelpful objectives such as completion of the syllabus and preparing the students to face the examination cause a disastrous effect on the language teaching situation.

So, the educational institutions are desired to work in the direction of making it mandatory to impart strong English language skills to their students.

The recent advances in multimedia technology offer Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as an alternative to the traditional mode of the lecture method followed in the teaching/learning of English. The CALL environment offers the learners, irrespective of their diversified needs, an opportunity to interact with the computer on one-to-one basis. This may be advantageous to an average or a weak student. The second important advantage is that it allows learner autonomy. The learners enjoy a certain amount of freedom as the teacher's role is confined to that of a facilitator. The onus of exposing the learner to both the major and ancillary skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing and Grammar and Vocabulary) remains with the teacher as they are essential for an individual to be considered as skilled and competent in the target language. [5]A normal classroom curriculum might fail to offer an integrated syllabus dealing with all the skills; but CALL methodology has immense potential to operate in such complex situations by integrating all the language skills into one complete whole.

II. DISCUSSION:

Learning through CALL has certain more advantages over the huge classroom, controlled by the teacher. One can enumerate the benefits as follows:

1. It provides one-to-one communication between the course material and the learner which allows him to have his own space and time and accommodates his pace of learning, slow or fast. (This solves the problem of the pace of the learner.)

2. With the machinery and software of the computer technology, the learner can always revert back for any reference or clarification. (This solves the problem of raising doubts often in the class and solves the problem of the weak students who are hesitant even to ask genuine doubts.)

3. In a country like India where the classes are widely heterogeneous, owing to various factors, the breeding of inferiority and superiority complexes can be totally avoided. (This solves the problem of increase in the already established inhibition.)

4. It is easier to revise the material to make it suitable to the needs of the learner than to train the teacher to suit to the fast changing needs of the English language. (This solves the problem of frequent printing after every revision and saves considerable time and energy on the part of the material producers and also the teachers.) [4]

5. Many and diverse exercises are available to the teacher to test the learners more frequently. As the questions are given after every unit, generating questions will not be a problem for the teacher. Even evaluation can be done quickly with the help

of the computer. (This is of great advantage to the teacher. Much time can be saved by the teacher which is otherwise spent in preparing questions and correcting the answers of the students.)

6. CALL also helps the students who go for higher education where National and International entrance or qualifying tests are conducted through CBTs.

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