Effects of e-learning on Language Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to do a research on the effects of e-learning and sub-categories such as internet; Web-based English learning and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on language learning. Before growing prevalence of Word Wide Web (www), people use emails for language learning and teaching (LL/LT). In network-based language learning (NBLL), people use computer-based educational activities.

The main advantage of e-learning is that it increases the engagement; attendance and motivation of students which are requisite for learning. By advent of Web and internet; English learning (EL) improved because internet had its own language and logic and was not limited to one culture. Indeed; learning English via internet challenges traditional from of learning. Internet is a virtual English environment. People become autonomous by using internet and they can independent from books and teacher such as chartrooms and mass media which increase the oral proficiencies of learners. the use of mass media such as books and manuscripts and internet media (like blogs; message boards; podcasts; and video sharing) are another faces of e-learning. Although using mass media and internet media are challenging and time consuming. They provide teacher and students with creative and practical ideas.

Keywords: E-learning, English language, Worde Wide Web, Internet media, Mass media.

1. Introduction

This paper shows the effects of e-learning and its parts on language learning. By using language learning in this paper we mean second language learning or foreign language learning. Language learning through distance education prevails all world and it can be done via internet, multimedia, CDs, DVDs and in many other forms. Since language learning is challenging and time-consuming and costs highly in some cases, by using distance education and e-learning we can reduce the amount of expenses and time. In this paper we go forward step by step. At first we start with definitions, advantages and disadvantages of e-learning and its parts on language learning then compare e-learning and traditional learning of language and finally deal with answering to question or problem of this paper; that is, the following question:

Is e-learning an appropriate substitute for traditional learning in language learning?

2. What is e-learning?
E-learning is commonly referred to intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning [1].

E-learning can be defined in this way too: the application of electronic systems such as internet, computers, multimedia CDs which their aim is to reduce the amount of expenses and goings and comings.

2.1. Advantages of e-learning:
Now that we get familiar with definitions of e-learning, it is time to get familiar with features and advantages of e-learning. By knowing following features, we can change our point of view towards e-learning.

1) It is learner-centred teaching process and the role of teacher is guide or facilitator of this teaching process.
2) Convenient for students to access any time, any place.
3) It is a kind of cooperative learning.
4) E-learning is fast and dynamic and reduces the amount of expenses (like: travel time and travel costs for students)
5) Fosters self-paced learning whereby students can learn at the rate they prefer.
6) E-Learning fosters interaction among students and instructors.
7) Comprehensive learning; i.e. it contains all instructional sources and tools such as virtual classes and simulations.
8) All activities such as enrolment, supervision, tuition are done by internet.
9) Lessons are prepared by different professors from different places.
10) Learners can learn more than one major or specialty.
11) Motivation: as stated in abstract part, e-learning increases motivation of learners and motivation is necessary for language learning especially foreign language learning because it affects all necessary parts of foreign language learning; that is, input (the knowledge that learner is exposed to it for the first time), bridging new materials to previous learned ones and output (what learner produces by using two previous items). Put it simply, by using technology and personalizing information we can increase motivation and motivation is pressing for attendance and engagement of learners.
12) The most notable advantages of most types of e-learning are flexibility, convenience and the ability to work at learner pace [2].

As you see, e-learning like communicative methods of language learning is established based on learners and learners are the main pillar in learning process and they can get self-dependent by using e-learning and choose what they want to do.

2.2. Disadvantages of e-learning
In spite of advantages of e-learning, it has some defects and disadvantages that are mentioned below.

1) E-learning decreases social relations among learners.
2) Some learners have little knowledge about using internet and computer so they are unable to work with them suitably.
3) e-learning reduces the amount of face-to-face meetings and amount of teacher’s supervision on learners.
4) Some teachers have less experience and acquaintance with this kind of teaching/learning process.
5) lingual/cultural differences
6) Extravagant expenses behalf virtual universities.
7) Technical limitations.
8) Lack of face-to-face interaction with a teacher.

Since e-learning happens in some virtual environments and is mostly based on using internet and can be done in different parts of the world, it reduces the amount of face-to-face interactions and reduces social relations. Also, since e-learning users need to be able to work with technologies like internet and computers, they have to be familiar with these things. Lack of technical knowledge can be problematic for users.

Up to now, we have talked about definitions, advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. Now it is time to talk about parts of e-learning at first we start with television as the most elementary electronic device in comparison with internet and computer and then go through online games, internet, multimedia, and blogs.

3. E-learning parts and their effects on language learning
After getting familiar with e-learning and its advantages and disadvantages, it is time to familiarize the readers with effects of its parts on language learning, so we arrange them below.

3.1. Electronic devices
The advantage of using electronic devices like television is that they consist of sounds and actions, so they can attract the attention of learners and children simply and affect the amount of attention. The more attention attracted by
television, the more learning happened. When children attracted by the actions, sounds and pictures of television, they try to imitate them at first and imitation can be considered as the first step in learning for children. To increase the amount of attention via television, we can also use female characters and short programs.

3.2. Online games

We can use online games as a language teaching device. As games are interesting and attract more attention from children and learners, they can affect directly the following parts of language learning [3].

1) Vocabulary: considering the context of games, learners confront with different vocabularies and try to use them in their pleasurable ways and so increase their motivation for learning.

2) Pronunciation: since pronunciation is a stressful part of language learning, children and learners can play some games vocally and reinforce their speaking ability and pronunciation and reduce the degree of mistake and anxiety. To strengthen pronunciation, learners can use online dictionaries too.

3.3 Internet and multimedia

According to Wikipedia: Developments in Internet and multimedia technologies are the basic enabler of e-learning, with content, technologies and services being identified as the three key sectors of the e-learning industry [4]. Although it can be seen that there are two additional sectors, those being the consulting and support sectors. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs provide multimedia with sounds, videos, graphics and texts which allow learners to be exposed to target language and culture.

To learn a language like English via using multimedia technologies, students should be self-directed and use new strategies. Since learning a language like English is done in an artificial way; that is, it happened in a large, teacher-dominated class and in a de-contextualized context in non-native countries, learning English via internet and multimedia is a difficult work. Internet helps people to communicate with native speakers via chat rooms and emails. In fact, students are exposed to a contextualized environment by using internet. Through using internet and web, students can reinforce their communicative competencies, familiarize with different cultures and strengthen their necessary skills like: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In web-based and internet learning, anxiety is reduced and responses are transferred quickly and learners get more confident. Teachers try to integrate internet with their instructional materials and teaching styles to create a meaningful learning environment. Emails and chat rooms which are done via internet are an important part for communication between learners and professors and also improve the writing skills of learners in language learning. Learners are able to enhance both their accuracy and fluency via using internet. People and learners get autonomous by using internet that some favorable factors affect this process and we mention some of them here: [5].

1) By using internet, learners are able to choose their own methods, learning materials and depth of study.
2) Self-monitoring
3) Cooperation
4) Websites which provide abundant listening, speaking, reading and writing texts.
5) Online English learning magazines
6) Chat rooms.

The above-mentioned factors cause learners to gain autonomy in their process and work. In spite of these factors, there are some factors which have a negative effect on autonomy of learners:

1) Learners: the learners who have a poor motivation and ability to gain autonomy can have a negative effect on themselves.
2) As language learning like English is an overwhelming work and needs motivation, it can have negative effect on learner too.

On aggregate, internet environment is a powerful learning environment which causes learners to get self-regulated and discuss on different topics and achieve meaningful learning.

3.4 Blogs

What is blog?

A blog has been defined as “a web application that displays serial entries with date and time stamps” [6].
Blogs are one of the most devices which used for communication and can be classified in education in following forms:
1) Learners create community blogs and put their articles of interest around specific subjects in it.
2) Colleges and universities create their own blogs and their experts in different subjects enrich them with worth while information.
3) Blog users: students use blogs as instructional benefits for their learning process.

What are the major benefits of blogging in language classroom?
The major benefits of blogging in the language classroom have been reported as “the choice of more appropriate Language on the part of the learners, the addition of new perspectives to the learners' thoughts, and the motivational Aspect of realizing that one's voice echoes in distant parts of the globe and is heard by others” [7].

Up to now, we have talked about the parts of e-learning and their effects. Now it is time to deal with traditional form of language learning and its difference with e-learning.

In traditional form of language learning, teacher is the authority and active part of class and students have passive role. On aggregate, traditional teaching emphasizes on:
1) Competition
2) Standard instruction for all
3) Allocate specific time and location for instruction
4) One-way instruction: teacher to student

But in e-learning emphasis is put on:
1) Group cooperation
2) Production and application of knowledge
3) Appropriate instruction which is consistent with learner abilities.

The above-mentioned matters are considered as differences between e-learning and traditional form of language learning.

Now it is time to answer to problem or question of our paper.
Is e-learning an appropriate substitute for traditional form of language learning?
Considering the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning and traditional form of language learning, we can conclude that e-learning is better and more useful than traditional form since it is found in most parts of the world and is easier to use. But in some cases, traditional form is better provided that we have no access to technologies and electronic devices. In developed and developing countries which people have access to internet and electronic devices, e-learning is better to use but in undeveloped countries which people have little knowledge about internet and computers and have poor technology, they have to use traditional form of language learning. Since the entire world proceeds towards internet and technological world, e-learning contains the world and teaching methods soon.

In a nutshell, using e-learning or traditional form depends on two main factors:
1) The ability of learners
2) Technological devices

4. Conclusion

Our effort in this paper is to show the effects of e-learning and compare it with traditional form of language learning. We try to mention these matters in an explicit and understandable way. We try to explain different parts of e-learning and their effects on language learning and finally try to answer to our raised problem. As the world progresses, the use of e-learning, electronic devices, internet, computers in teaching and learning process increases too and we have to synchronize ourselves with it and increase our abilities to be able to work with technologies to increase our knowledge, the more teachers and learners get familiar with technologies, the more they can use and incorporate them with their teaching styles and these technologies provide teachers with practical and creative ideas and make them create their own eclectic methods. So we should arrange some programs to teach our teachers and learners how to use internet and computers and increase their information about multimedia and other devices which can be used for language learning and thus they can keep up with the world.
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