UGC Minor Research Report

Report of First year 2011-12

Title of the project:

The Use of Web Tools by Undergraduate Teachers of English in Gujarat

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Introduction

It has been argued for quite some time now that web tools can be successfully used for language teaching and learning purposes. A large number of studies on the use of e-mails (Dudeney 2000; 1994), discussion fora (Warschauer and Kern 2000; Warschauer 1995), chats (Chappelle 2001; Eastment 1999) already point to the fact that web-based tools can be used effectively for language enhancement.

The use of computers in language teaching no longer demands the question 'why' but 'how'. Computers no longer are simply 'tutor' or 'pupil' but are mediational tools that mould ways we interact with the world (Crook 1994). Shetzer and Warschauer (2000:182) emphasize this point when they declare that electronic literacy has become the norm in language teaching rather than an option. The rapid spread of commercial multimedia materials for language teaching has given a boost to the teaching of language through online projects (Slater and Varney-Burch 2001: 51). Principles or guidelines for developing effective multimedia materials have been attested upon by a series of researchers (Gordan 1994; Hemard 1997; Levy 1997). It has also been noted by Levy (1997: 84) that computer designed materials need to take into consideration the potential users and the learning context of those users. Further, it must take into consideration the software and hardware possibilities of the materials since in certain situations they may have a restraining effect rather than a facilitating one.

This research project is an intervention in the context of India and would look into the use of web tools by undergraduate teachers of English in Gujarat to enhance their learners' competencies.

Origin of the research problem

Unfortunately, not much work has been carried out in this field in India. Though there have been intermittent attempts to study the use of technological tools like web devices, till now there has been no systematic study of their use for teaching English in India at any level. The challenge lies in the fact that when available resources increase in number, as they everyday, leading to an expansion in the learning environment, classroom discourse itself is transformed. There is, however, no study yet in India that has studied direct causality between technologies that are introduced and the practices that follow. We need to have a closer look at the reciprocal impact of and tensions between institutional practices and available material and social resources that mediate educational activities. This explains why for instance Learning Management Systems (like Moodle or WiziQ) have tended to remain repositories for instructional material and learner management tools despite some communicative and collaborative potential. If we are to understand how technologies (may) affect and ultimately improve learning and teaching, we have to address how the practitioners – the teachers – themselves use technology in their immediate teaching-learning environment especially so at the tertiary

level (in the context of this study, undergraduate) where students come with some knowledge of the use of technology though not essentially for pedagogic purposes. It has also been noticed that many teachers at the undergraduate level would use technology for their personal use. The study would focus on whether such competencies are transferred to their pedagogic practices.

Interdisciplinary relevance

The study would have a major interdisciplinary relevance since it lies at the intersection of three interrelated fields – pedagogy, English and technology. With major developments in the field of pedagogy, especially in the field of English Language Teaching, it is now imperative that one comprehends, records and analyses how such pedagogic practices align with modern developments in technology, especially web tools like social networking sites, e-mails, blogs and wikis. Since these technological innovations are dependent mostly on the use of English, it would be interesting to see how teachers of English use these innovations in the teaching of English to their students.

Review of Research and Development in the Subject:

In spite of the plethora of studies on language learning and teaching strategies, there has been relatively a dearth of literature on the influence of technology on teaching strategies. However, there have been a few individual attempts in this direction. For example, Hulstijn

(1993) tried to document learners' use of an on-line dictionary investigating vocabulary strategies that they adopt. Similarly, Chapelle & Mizuno (1989) in their study tried to investigate the learner's use of reference materials for obtaining information about the second language on computer based language task. Chapelle (2001) significantly provides a brief list of research assessing learners' knowledge and strategies with CASLR (Computer Assisted Second Language Research) Tasks. It has also been noted by Levy (1997: 84) that computer designed materials need to take into consideration the potential users and the learning context of those users. Further, it must take into consideration the software and hardware possibilities of the materials since in certain situations they may have a restraining effect rather than a facilitating one. Beatty (2003) argues that the introduction of computers in the classroom has fostered changes in the teaching and learning of language and related subjects like literature. This means that computers are no longer something exotic that *may be* used in the language classroom but *must* be used to create an interactive environment. However, they need to be used judiciously so that it does not produce too quick a transition that may be counterproductive but gradually so that a teacher is not *replaced* but *facilitated*. Keeping this in mind, I have chosen a simple project so that both the teacher and the learner are taken into consideration. I have also tried to keep this project context-bound since the institutional situation that I am in does not allow much

experimentation with either software or hardware materials. This means that I need to work with the available software or freeware available on the worldwide web. However, the project is computer-based so that the potential of the medium may be used to make the teachers and the students realise that such activities can prove to be more interactive and user-friendly than a conventional classroom (Hardistry and Windeatt 1989: 7).

The project follows a genre-based approach as outlined by Swales (1990, 2004). Swales' work on the introduction to research articles has been pivotal to understand the generic approach to teaching in general, and ELT in particular. The concept of the 'research genre' as articulated by Swales (2004: 217) is central to my project. It is for this purpose that the webpage has been designed keeping in mind that the students need to comprehend the nature of research genre itself so that they could go on to both read and write about them. The exercises have been designed to constantly reinforce the notion of genre as outlined by Swales: a genre is a set of communicative events sharing a communicative purpose. In the case of my project, the genre is that of the research article. The project however does not limit itself to the research article only but goes on to explore the wider understanding of the discourse community of research. Therefore, constructing the webpage was not a linear process of choosing an appropriate theory

and then translating it into CALL materials. It involved taking into consideration factors like the level of the students, their academic goals, in-class or out-class activity, teacher input and availability and the educational background of the learners. These points will be discussed in the third section of this paper.

The use of video in the language classroom has been attested for in the literature (Stempleski and Tomalin 1990; Allan 1985). Stempleski (1990: 7) argues that videos can be the most effective if they use authentic materials. MacKnight (1983: 2) asserts that video is a valuable source of authentic language within a context and can lead to a greater understanding since video has both linguistic and paralinguistic features. It brings a dynamic nature to the classroom and research shows that learners tend to learn more with the help of an audio-visual aid like video. For the purposes of the project, I have used clips of recorded video so that the points made by the tutors in the videos can supplement the learning points that are incorporated within the exercises. However, a word of caution here. The videos are not used to create the impression that the tutors' opinions are 'truths' but to generate discussion so that the students can open up to more ideas. This I believe will promote learner autonomy that has been found to be crucial in CALL (Beatty 2003: 88). Videos also can be extremely motivating material and can provide the learner with both

audio and video inputs that may help them in listening to academic discourse thereby developing their academic skills.

The use of genre-based literacy pedagogy with technology has given rise to a number of models of teaching (cf. Hewings 2001).The advantages of using computer-based instructions for the teaching of reading and writing has been discussed in details by various researchers. After the development of genre theory, a great amount of emphasis has been given to genre-based instruction with the help of computers in the fields of reading and writing. Ellis (2005: 210) argues that the use of learning technologies in genre-based pedagogy can definitely lead to a refining of the pedagogical framing process and can help learners to achieve their goal in an explicit and autonomous manner. Similarly Drury (2005: 251) posits that the inclusion of learning technologies within teaching benefits the students and the teachers, "their interactions and the learning goal." It is for this purpose that the project follows a genre-based approach with special emphasis on research articles and abstracts and incorporates technology within the framework.

Chapelle distinctly proclaims the need of research on the following questions:

- what evidence suggests that learners increase their literacy in language use through technology?

- what evidence suggests that teachers' use of technology for language learning can enhance the language learning experience?

Hence, there is a necessity to measure the impact of the use of technology in terms of language learning.

Beatty (2003) argues that the introduction of computers in the classroom has fostered changes in the teaching and learning of language and related subjects like literature. This means that computers are no longer something exotic that *may be* used in the language classroom but *must* be used to create an interactive environment. However, they need to be used judiciously so that it does not produce too quick a transition that may be counterproductive, but gradually so that a teacher is not *replaced* but *facilitated*. Reinking, Labbo and McKenna (2000) assert that there are different levels and types of technological integration that can be achieved. Using Piaget's model of 'assimilation' (where new information does not change existing information structures) and accommodation (where it does), the authors put forward the view that technology can be introduced at the assimilative level and then progressively developed to the level of accommodation. Within the context of Gujarat, this needs to be studied.

The study thus would be significant in two ways:

a) it would be able to establish an inventory of web tools that teachers use for classroom transaction;

b) it would be able to suggest interventions and remedial measures for the use of technological tools to enhance language learning in the classroom

Objectives

a) to study the use of web tools that teachers of English at the undergraduate level put to for teaching the language

b) to find the correlation between the use of technology by undergraduate teachers of English for personal use and for pedagogic use

c) the find out the awareness that teachers have of the possibility of using web tools for pedagogic purposes

d) to suggest interventions and remedies for using technology in the undergraduate English classroom

Methodology

The study would use the survey method for achieving its objectives. For this, a questionnaire would be designed, piloted and administered to undergraduate teachers of English in Gujarat. The projected sample size would be 100 teachers. The questionnaire would take into consideration the objectives mentioned above and would be geared towards eliciting responses on the above mentioned aspects. This

would be followed by field visits and interviews across a cross-section of the teachers that would be used for buttressing the questionnaire data. A questionnaire would also be administered to a smaller sample of approximately 50 undergraduate students across Gujarat so that their responses to the use of technology (in this case, web tools) can be recorded. The teachers and students' responses would then be correlated and cross tabulated to arrive at interventional and remedial measures.

The project

During August and September 2011, I did a quick survey to gain some insights into how people use some of the newer features of the web such as blogs, tags and social networking sites. I was also interested in comparing the extent to which these tools are used by people who work making sites with those who just use web. The survey was part of research for a paper I was presenting at Oz-IA 08.

The survey considered these issues:

- How many people provide comments on the web pages of others?
- How many people have their own blogs and comment on the blogs of others?

- How often is content tagged and how often do people use tags and tag clouds when retrieving information from sites?
- How much do people use video and photo sharing sites like Flickr and Youtube?
- How much do they use social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace?
- And finally, how much do they use RSS?

PARTICIPANTS

A questionnaire was prepared keeping the following in mind:

- Teachers who just use the web either socially or for work (60 people)

For the teachers, I surveyed 10 people from 6 different categories of users. 50 participants came from 5 targeted groups; volunteers for a not-for-profit organisation, museum scientists and project officers, media workers, school teachers and tertiary students. 10 participants were untargeted members of the general community.

All the participants were randomly selected and I had no knowledge of how any of the participants used the web prior to the survey.

QUESTIONS

The survey contained a total of 21 questions that relate to the use of: blogs, content tagging and tag clouds, video and photo sharing sites, social networking sites and RSS.

The aim of the questions was to determine how often each participant used a particular web tool or feature, and how they used it. For example, one question asked participants to indicate if they had blog. And for those who answered yes, there was a follow-up question asking how often they made a new posting. The next question asked if the participant had ever commented on the blog of someone else. Once again, there was a follow-up question asking those who had made comments to indicate how often they did so.

Basically the survey considered passive use of the tools such as looking at the photos or video of someone else. And active use like putting photos or videos on a sharing site, having your own blog or Myspace page or providing tags for some web content.

After completing all the surveys, I collated the responses to each question by participants in each survey category and averaged the results. This gave an averaged usage score by survey category for each question, expressed as a percentage.

Web Users: The tools were used on average by 38% of participants

- Not-for-profit volunteers – 41%
- Museum staff – 35%

- Media workers – 43%
- Teachers – 25%
- Tertiary students – 63%
- General community – 23%

As can be seen however, there was a much larger variation in the responses from the different categories of web users, with the tools used on average by 63% of the students, while at the other end of the scale, the general community participants had an average usage of 23% and for teachers it was only slightly greater at 25%.

PASSIVE AND ACTIVE USE

When we look in more detail at how these tools are used, there is quite a difference between what I call Passive use, which is visiting or looking at the contributions of others, and Active use such as making comments, putting up material or providing tags.

As might be expected, in both areas of use, the web evangelists surveyed at a WSG meeting reported much high usage. With Passive use for example, all of the evangelists said they had visited a social networking page or viewed a photo or blog of someone else, compared to about 80% for the other participants. There was a greater difference in the use of tags (or tag clouds) to locate information with

90% of evangelists saying they used them compared to just 27% of general web users (and I suspect this score is a little inflated).

When it came to Active use, the differences were more striking:

	Teachers and students (general community)
Made comment on web page or blog	34
Posted photo/video	22
Commented on photo/video (eg Flickr)	32
Own social network page (eg Myspace)	55
Tagged web content	18

AGE DIFFERENCE

I think it is worth making a quick mention of difference levels of use by participants of different ages. Although the survey had six age categories, for the purposes of this project I have collated the results into two age brackets; those 30 and under (32 participants) and those 31 and over (58 participants).

Use by age difference (% of participants)

	30 yrs or less (n=32)	31 yrs or more (n=58)
Made comment on web page or blog	56	40
Posted photo/video	44	28
Commented on photo/video (eg Flickr)	62	29
Own social network page (eg Myspace)	97	40
Tagged web content	44	17
Subscribe to RSS	37	34

As might be expected, the younger group are more likely to have their own Facebook, Myspace or beebo type page or to be actively involved

in posting photos or videos and commenting on those of others. However, these differences are not much as I was expecting.

The project also had a form of a webpage and uses a series of hot potatoes exercises based on the topics above that have to be completed by the students. The project however, is not a self-access material since it requires teachers to coordinate it. The computer is used as a facilitator rather than a tutor (Kern and Warschauer 2000: 10) in this project and follows Crook's classification of computer-based educational activities (Crook 1994). For this purpose, every unit in the project has a PowerPoint-based pre-task and post-task which is to be used in the classroom before the students proceed to engage in the computer-based activities. Both the pre-tasks and the post-tasks are meant to generate group discussion and generate ideas about the tasks that the students are going to complete. This also has a practical side to it. In my institution there are only 15 computers available for a student strength of 80 and therefore requires the students to be divided into small groups before they are sent into the computer lab. Moreover, the computer time is restricted to two hours per week for each group since the lab is required for other courses that are also run by the institute. It is for this purpose that the project should be ideally run for a period of six weeks so that the students have enough time to understand what is required of them as well as digest the information that is given to them.

The webpage has been designed using multimedia as defined by Beatty (2003: 38) and contains texts, sound and video. For the purposes of authenticity, actual interviews of tutors of the University of Warwick have been included to reinforce the teaching sections of the projects. The videos have been used in such a way that they complement the exercises. Some of the videos have also been used for generating discussions in the pre- and the post-task. In the next section, I will deal with the theoretical and conceptual background of the project and carry out a review of related literature. The third section describes the project in detail and the final section is an attempt to understand the implications for language teaching of such computer-assisted projects.

The exercises that have been included in this webpage have mostly used the software *Hot Potatoes*, an authoring software developed by S. Arneil, M. Holmes and H. Street of the University of Victoria in the United States of America. Winke and McGregor (2001) assert that it is not only useful for language teachers but can be used to create various types of exercises. The reason for using this software extensively in the webpage is due to two reasons. It is freely available on the internet and therefore does not demand monetary resources which might be a problem in my institution since innovation is something that may not be readily welcome especially if it costs something. Secondly, the software is highly interactive and can be

changed and formatted according to the need of the teachers (Arneil and Holmes 1999). Moreover, the software provides an endless variety and diversity and should not lead to boredom in the learner. Another important aspect of the software is the option of feedback that it provides to the teacher. If the learner is to be autonomous there needs to be a constant source of feedback that needs to be provided. It is for this purpose that I have provided maximum feedback in all the exercises so that the learners can track their progress. However, one of the disadvantages of the software is that it requires a lot of time to create and needs a bit of formatting to fit into a webpage especially with the linked files. Nevertheless, the software has more benefits than drawbacks and therefore is extensively used all over the world by practising teachers.

Finally, the webpage incorporates both pre- and post-tasks that need to be carried out in the classroom under the supervision of a teacher. These tasks are made with the presentation package PowerPoint because they could be used by the learners working in pairs or groups on a computer, printed off and distributed on paper, as well as used by the teacher by projecting it at the front of the class (Slater and Varney-Burch 2001). Since the development of interactive-compensatory model in reading and listening (Alderson and Urquhart 1984; Carrel, Devine and Eskey 1988; Lunzner and Gardner 1979; Urquhart and Weir 1998; Wallace 1992), it has been repeatedly affirmed that pre-

task is an essential aspect for triggering off the schemata of learners. Similarly, post-tasks are valuable in initiating extended discussions on the topic that has already been covered. In the webpage, both pre-tasks and post-tasks are in the form of PowerPoint presentations since they will be easy to use in the classroom. The tasks have been devised in such a way that they either provide a lead in to the topic at hand or are extensions of the topic that has already been covered. All the pre- and the post-tasks take communicative principles

Reflection on the Project

At this point, I think one needs to address the question of choosing a project for academic reading of such nature in my context. Eastment (1999: 15), in her review of reading material available on the web claims that 'the amount of purpose-written ELT [reading] material on the Web remains small.' The amount of materials to develop academic reading and writing or reviewing is even smaller. It was thus felt necessary by me to develop a project that could at the very least introduce my students to the very nature of the discourse community to which they belong. Moreover, the institution that I work in is not very resource-rich in terms of technology and therefore the question of my students exploring on their own is remote. This brings us to the next point that I would like to make.

The activities and the exercises outlined above makes rare use of the Web for teaching purposes, except where I have used the Web to search for materials. The reason is that the internet connection in the institution is dial-up modem-based and any attempt to include exercises or tasks that requires the students to visit the Web to complete them is bound to create problems in terms of connectivity. Since connection is very slow (dependent on a server that services fifteen colleges), net-based activities have generally been avoided.

Thirdly, a question may be raised about the nature of repetitiveness of the exercises. The project uses only Hot Potatoes-based exercises for two reasons. First, the software is freely available as outlined earlier. Secondly, it was felt that using too much 'cutting edge' technology would intimidate the students who may then spend too much time trying to sort out the software than concentrating on the task at hand. I am dealing with students here who may have the minimal skills technologically. As Davis (2002) points out, the important thing in a web page is the content 'and no amount of graphic artistry or technology will take the place of poor content.' Moreover, repetition of the same software would provide a comfort-level to the learners and the teacher does not have to spend undue amounts of time explaining the intricacies of the software each time an exercise opens. The focus of the project has been therefore on content rather than on

technology. The technology has been used to facilitate learning rather than hinder it. In addition, the facility of feedback that is available in the software Hot Potatoes is a bonus. Richards (1997: 196. In Beatty 2003) points out that in a learning situation the teacher's role inevitably includes 'giving feedback on student learning and reviewing and re-teaching when necessary'. The Hot Potatoes assimilates this principle admirably and can be especially be adapted to situations where classes are large and individual feedback by teachers is well-nigh impossible. The feedback given in the exercises therefore, not only provides an access to their errors but also helps them to review and reflect on the processes. It is also for this purpose that some of the matching exercises and quizzes have multiple correct answers to drive-in the point home in the feedback that in language teaching there are not always correct answers.

Fourthly, the exercises in the project, including the pre- and the post-tasks have been made keeping the principles of collaborative learning in mind (Logan 1995). Almost all the exercises are either pair or group-based. Even the computer exercises can be done in a similar way. This has both a practical and pedagogic reason. Since the number of computers is limited as mentioned earlier, principles of collaborative learning can be utilised to overcome this problem. Moreover, since the group of students is mixed ability, the pairs or the

groups can be formed keeping in mind the abilities of individual students. It has also been felt that since the CALL activities and exercises themselves are social and interactive in nature, a learning environment that follows the traditional teacher-fronted classroom may not work very well. An environment that is not conducive to collaboration may make it more difficult for learners who are doing such activities possibly for the first time.

Fifthly, the Hot Potatoes software can provide an excellent sense of achievement for students. Since the students would work on these exercises, get a feedback and rework on them at their own pace, it would definitely provide them with a sense of satisfaction. Moreover, language noticing activities cold give them the essential tools to cope with the language they encounter during their coursework. Another problem that a teacher may face while implementing a CALL project in my context is the danger of rejection by students who may consider such an activity as peripheral to their 'main' coursework. But since the webpage clearly states that it is intrinsically related to their coursework and is meant to reinforce what they are going to do in their course, the students would take the project seriously and would, I think, actively engage with it. In this manner too the project will engage their interest and motivate them to achieve its completion.

Sixthly, a word about the time invested by the teacher in producing such materials. Since producing a multimedia project is extremely time consuming questions have been raised about the tenability of such products. For example, Bailin (1995 In Beatty 2003) criticizes the efforts and investment needed to produce such materials. He also argues that such CALL activities have limited effectiveness and does not lead to a reduction of teaching hours at all. Moreover, it has also been pointed out that since a large number of multimedia materials are available commercially designed by competent and proficient designers, teacher-produced multimedia materials are an extravagance rather than a necessity. One needs to argue over here that though a large number of professionally designed materials are available, the teacher understand their context bet. They would know the needs and the necessities of their students much better than a commercial designer. Therefore, the time invested by the teacher is well spent and can reap rich rewards in the future. Moreover, such materials once created could be readily used as supplementary materials and with minor updating can be used for a long time (Slater and Varney-Burch 2001). Thus the time spent in making such multimedia materials can be very rewarding.

Finally, the idea of any CALL is not to limit the production of materials to the teachers only but also encourage students to actively

co-participate in the production of materials. Thus though the project above is only limited to the teacher-produced materials, I think, teachers need to encourage students to produce their own materials that may be looked upon and commented upon by the teacher through appropriate feedback. It is more so necessary in a context like mine where there are large classes and a lack of resources in terms of technology. The large class is often seen as an encumbrance rather than a resource. But if such a project like mine can be used to instil the initial confidence in the learners to interact with the technology, then the next logical step would be to encourage them to use the technology to produce their own materials. In a large class this can lead to a production of a large body of materials that then can be peer reviewed and used for future learners. In this way, a large class may be turned to one's advantage through technology that may not be possible in a conventional classroom.

The aim of this project was to survey technological innovation for teaching skills in the state of Gujarat in India. One needs to understand the contextual background with a view to appreciate the need for technological innovation to students in my specific context. The postgraduate course of which I am a part of at my institution has student strength of eighty for the two years that the course runs. The students generally come after doing a basic graduation degree in

literature for three years and are not exposed to the academic necessities of doing an ELT course at the postgraduate level. This therefore creates a gap between the skills required for doing a literature course, which in India, demands writing comprehension questions on texts and no in-built critical appreciation of texts, and an ELT course that expects writing about and critically analysing language with the technical vocabulary required for such a course. To complicate the problem further, the students may not have enough linguistic skills to either comprehend or write about academic topics nor any exposure to genre-based reading and writing. For their postgraduate course, the students need to read research articles and write critically about them and this becomes a hindrance which sometimes can lead to insurmountable problems. The aim of this project is to introduce the students to the 'discourse community' (Swales 1990: 24) of ELT research so that they can cope with the demands of such an encounter.

The focus of this project, obviously, is not to make the students fully aware of all the skills required for the discourse community of ELT research. It rather stresses on the specific skill of reading ELT articles with further specialized focus on their introductions and conclusions. The project also looks at reviewing research articles and the concept of peer reviewing for publication. It then goes on to look at reading

abstracts of articles to formulate ideas about articles so that they may be used for literature review. The final two sections of the project look at the importance of language in writing for research journals and listening to academic discussions. I feel that these initial skills are absolutely fundamental to belong to the discourse community of ELT research. The project therefore is an attempt to *initiate* the students into the field of ELT and hopes to generate enough interest in them to carry on with their efforts.

Research Methodology

This chapter lays down the basic methodological principles of this study so that the interpretations and findings outlined in the next chapter are adequately and appropriately comprehended. As a research tool, a questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the second-year M A [ELT] students of H M Patel Institute of English Training and Research, Gujarat, India as well as teachers in Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad. I decided to use a questionnaire for three reasons: firstly, as Dornyei (2003) points out, questionnaires can create a wealth of data within a manageable framework; secondly, since my students are in Gujarat and there was no other way of communicating with them than from a distance, it was felt by me that a questionnaire could be the best possible option. And finally, since a questionnaire is a versatile tool that could be used with a large body of students without requiring my presence, it was decided to use it.

The following sections deal with the descriptions of the student sample and the questionnaire, the details of questionnaire administration, an account of the variables, and certain limitations that may have affected the questionnaire data. It was also felt by me that since the questionnaire alone would not produce enough reliable and valid data to make broad generalisations, comparing the questionnaire data received with the existing syllabus and the final year-end question papers could produce a better understanding of the scenario within the institution. Thus, a section on documentary evidence used has also been included.

The Sample for the Study

The sample for this study consisted of 35 second-year post-graduate students of H M Patel Institute of English, Gujarat, India and 35 teachers of Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad districts. The sample was restricted to this size due to the fact that the first-year students were not yet admitted to the course and therefore, could not be administered the questionnaire since the research was carried out during the summer break. The students are aged between 21 and 23 years and consisted of 24 males and 11 females. All of them belonged to the second-year of the course and have been together for a period of at least one academic year within the institution. All the students have an undergraduate degree in English literature, the minimum requirement for admission to the course being three-years of an English degree

course. Most of the students would have studied English as L2 for a period of, at least, five years (the details are given in the next chapter) and their L2 reading proficiency would vary depending on the amount of exposure that they had to English (discussed in further details in chapter four). A point that may be made here about the students is that a majority of them come from a rural background with no or the barest minimum exposure to English outside a formal classroom environment. The language that they speak as their L1 is Gujarati but there may be a few exceptions. However, there are no students that use English as their L1. During the two-year course, the students are supposed to complete eight papers dealing with literature, linguistics, language teaching methodology, language teaching, and business communication (cf. Appendix III). All the papers, as mentioned in the first chapter, are both externally and internally marked in the ratio of 70:30. This group was administered a questionnaire primarily to answer the research questions that were asked in the first chapter dealing with reading strategies, motivation, self access and multimedia.

Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 50 items and was divided into four major sections: background information, strategies of reading, reading and motivation, and an open-ended free writing section

Section I: Background Information

The section on the background information was geared towards finding out the amount of L2 exposure that the students had, the initial age when the respondents actually started reading, and the kind of books that they read in their L1 and L2. To investigate the latter, a list of possible categories was provided but an open-ended option was also made available to which the students could add anything that they might have thought was not on the list, and would have read. It also attempted to find out the kind of reading materials that are available at their homes (again a list of categories was provided but students could add to it), as well as the respondents' own perception of the influence that their L1 reading might have on their L2. In the questionnaire, the items dealing with L1 influence on L2 reading were framed a bit differently. One (item 8) tried to probe the perception that students have of reading in L1 and its perceived influence on helping them read in their L2. The other (item 9) tried to understand their perspective on the importance of their current L1 reading in improving their L2. And finally, there were items on their rating of their own reading abilities in L1 and L2. Since the literature is unanimous in the opinion that exposure in the target language does affect the development of reading skills in language learners (Carrell et al. 1988; Anderson et al. 1991; Urquhart and Weir 1998), it was felt by me that a knowledge of the learners' exposure to English could help us to understand the nature of their reading strategies development. It might also help in the understanding of the level of

motivation and the requisite language skills ('language threshold', though not in a technical sense) that the students possess. Items on the sorts of reading materials that the students used initially, and at present, were included to gauge whether the students were 'readers' at all either in their L1 or L2. It was also felt that an analysis of the initial reading materials and the present ones would enable this research to comprehend what sort of reading materials were the students exposed to generally. This could help in formulating suggestions that could enable the readers to become better readers.

Both Nuttall (1996) and Aebersold and Field (1997) agree that family or community influences play an important role in developing reading skills. It was thus felt appropriate by me to include an item that would highlight the kinds of reading materials that the students find at home. This was done to serve two purposes: a) to determine whether the students belonged to a reading 'culture' by which I mean a conducive atmosphere for extensive reading, and b) the types of reading materials that the students are generally exposed to outside the classroom.

Though literature is divided about the influence of L1 reading skills on L2, there seems to be some credibility to the opinion that a favourable attitude towards reading in L1 could positively affect attitudes towards reading in L2 (Bell 1995; Walter 2004). It is for this reason that I included an item that could plausibly measure the

attitude of this group of students to their L1 reading and their opinion on its influence on their L2 reading. It was also assumed that this could relate to the students' self-perception of their own reading abilities in L1 and L2, and therefore two items were included that asked the students to self-rate their reading abilities both in L1 and L2.

Section II: Use of web tools

The second section on the strategies of reading has been divided into three distinct sets of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and support. The items in this section have been derived from an instrument developed by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2002) and revised by Mokhtari and Reichard (2004).The instrument that they developed was specifically meant to measure strategy awareness among both native and non-native students and was called MARSI (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory). I felt that this instrument that they developed, though not in the form of a questionnaire, could be used for the purposes of my research since the aim of this inventory is to judge the awareness of strategy use by the students. Eight items on the use of metacognitive (adapted from the original 13), six items on the use of cognitive (from the original 8) and five items on the use of support strategies (adapted from the original 9) were used, the total being nineteen items on strategies. It was also felt by me that the original instrument used by Mokhtari and Reichard had

to be modified for the purposes of the questionnaire since many of the categories overlapped in the original. For example, the metacognitive strategies of 'using text clues' and 'using typographical aids' could be listed together under one item; the cognitive strategies of 'reading slowly' and 'adjusting reading rate', and the support strategies of 'summarizing' and 'paraphrasing' similarly could be subsumed under the same categories. Another practical reason for the reduction of the original instrument was the fact that inclusion of all the thirty items of the original would have made the questionnaire unwieldy and long, a drawback that Dornyei (2003) warns against. And finally, those strategies that were accorded primacy in the literature (cf. Aebersold and Field 1997) were chosen for the questionnaire.

There are various reasons why the different categories within Wigfield –Guthrie model got a varied load of items:

a) as mentioned earlier, the public examination system within Gujarat makes the relationship between expectancy value and degree of success highly loaded towards extrinsic motivational factors since the examination is a gateway to 'success' in life; my intention through the questionnaire was to investigate whether the students are intrinsically motivated to read at all, and if yes, to what extent; that is the reason why the highest load of items is on the factor of intrinsic motivation;

b) the syllabus that is meant to be administered to the students has a high load of literary texts (Appendix III) and since the reading of these texts are meant to be tested in the public examinations, it is highly evident that the entire system is geared towards extrinsic motivational factors; however, do these factors help the students to read other texts like newspapers and the internet?? The items on extrinsic motivational factors are meant to probe this issue;

c) the three items in the 'importance of reading' category are listed separately since it tries to fathom the students' own perception of what they think reading is going to achieve for them as well as how important reading actually is for them; they however, may be subsumed under the 'intrinsic motivation' category;

d) the other items try to understand factors like social issues and reading challenge involved for the students.

Finally, there are five items on the students' perception of reading support that could be provided to them. The support ranged from teacher or peer support to computer and general support. The response options relating to motivation and reading support were based on a six-point Likert scale and consisted of a total of 20 items. The final item in the questionnaire was an open-ended response item that asked

for students' general opinion on reading or a particular reading experience.

Procedure

Before the questionnaire was administered to the students, it was sent out to my Director and five teacher friends at the Sardar Patel University. Certain items that seemed either ambiguously worded or could create confusion in the minds of the students were reworded based on the comments. For example, the item 'Do you read slowly and carefully' (item number 20) was reworded to 'Do you always read slowly and carefully?' since it was felt that the former could lead to a confusion in comprehension. Similarly, in the 'background section', the items on 'Age' and 'Gender' were added after the comments.

The questionnaire was administered electronically and the administrator, a colleague of mine at the institution, was requested to answer any questions relating to the questionnaire in person. The questionnaire was saved on the desktops at the computer centre of my institution and the students were asked to fill it in at their leisure time. However, since the questionnaires needed to be sent back to me, the administrator advised the students to complete it within a week or so. A week after the questionnaires were sent out, the administrator sent them back as electronic attachments. In total, 35 questionnaires were

received back which is 100% of the total student strength in the second year.

The questionnaire contained a brief overview of the purpose of the study and contained instructions for the students and teachers in each section as to how to complete the questions. All the responses on strategies were meant to be ticked since they were either based on a five-point or a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Always) or 1 (strongly disagree) and 6 (strongly agree), and statistically measured through SPSS (version 14.0). The students were advised in the questionnaire to work at their own pace and that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in their responses. The colleague who supervised the administration of the questionnaire was also personally advised to allow the students ample amount of time as well as to explain to them words or questions that they might fail to comprehend. The colleague was briefed previously about the nature of the questionnaire and advised to go though it in case there were any questions that he intended to raise.

However, one of the limitations of the questionnaire was that though the research concerns itself with self-access language learning, there were no questions on the use or utility of the self access centre. Though this is undeniably a lack, there were reasons why questions related to the SAC were not included. Firstly, the concept of SAC had to be explained to the students which would have made the

questionnaire too lengthy. Secondly, though the institution does have a SAC, it is practically disorganised and non-functional and therefore, the students do not really have any knowledge of how an efficient SAC functions. It was thought more appropriate, therefore by me, to work with the materials available in the SAC and try to organise it through multimedia, rather than include questions on SAC in the questionnaire. And finally, the importance of the SAC can only be gauged if the students are shown to be motivated readers and that is what the questionnaire tries to achieve. In the next chapter the questionnaire data will be analysed to identify the strategies, motivation factors and perception of reading support quantitatively as well as qualitatively, to categorise the main trends, and what could be done to help the students support their reading.

Suggestions

Self-Access Centre, Multimedia and use of web tools

As outlined earlier, the SAC in the institution is in a state of disarray. The following steps were taken to reorganize the SAC:

a) As a first step, the books in the centre were listed with the help of a colleague of mine to produce a simple catalogue. The list produced an eclectic collection of 250 books, 41 film DVDs and 41 Videos (Appendix IV). Since this was the raw list, I thought of organising the books using a simple generic principle.

b) A principle of categorisation by broad literary genres was followed. The first 100 books in the list, as a sample, was then categorised thereby producing 9 major categories: Adventure Fiction, Biographical Fiction, Classic Fiction, Contemporary Fiction, Crime Fiction, Fable/ Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Humour, and Miscellaneous. It must be noted here that this is only a loose classification of the first 100 book as a random sample and does not in any way exhaust the possibilities of other genres being available.

c) An interactive webpage (cf. enclosed CD) was designed to guide the students to the SAC so that they are provided some pre-support before they actually use the texts in the self-access centre. While designing the website the following principles were kept in mind:

i) since the website was meant to serve a guiding function, the assumption is that the students would have to go through the catalogue in the webpage before they actually start borrowing books from the SAC; it is therefore used both as an advanced visual organiser (Chun and Plass 1996) as well as an Integrated Learning System (Underwood 2000) where the students could not only have a brief preview of the books but also have an avenue for discussing the books that they have read on an open virtual forum. Since there is a lack of

any substantial amount of literature on the sort of 'priming' done here, I think this constitutes an original way of designing a SAC that links strategy-use, motivation and multimedia;

ii) the webpage was meant to be as user-friendly as possible so that it produces an impetus for the students to read (cf. Beatty 2003 for the importance of user-friendly nature of websites); for this purpose, the generic classification used to categorise the first 100 books of the SAC list, were made into interactive buttons acting as hyperlinks to the relevant pages; there are thus links for all the genres as well as to the films and the videos available in the SAC

iii) to provide an orientation as well as to gain an understanding of their own interests, as well as to link to the strategy of 'previewing' (mstrat2) and intrinsic motivation (mot7), a link button has been provided in the home page that guides the students to a simple questionnaire based on the adventure, crime and thriller sections of the SAC; the questionnaire consists of 10 questions that are meant to probe their interests in the adventure, crime or thriller genres; the students are asked to score their responses between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree); once the total score has been calculated, the questionnaire page

redirects the students to another link page that gives them an indication of their interests and what kind of books would match their interests; since this website has been designed as a sample to indicate the potential of multimedia to improve motivation, only one questionnaire has been designed but a more comprehensive questionnaire with more elaborate and interactive scoring system could be used later;

iv) the pages on particular genres contain a list of the books available in that particular genre; each book is then further linked to a brief preview of the books, mainly about its plot construction, in order to act as an advance visual organiser; images were used, whenever possible, to supplement the preview so that the students could activate their relevant schemata both from the preview as well as the illustrations; it was also felt that the strategy of 'visualization' (cstrat5) could be primed by using the visual possibilities of multimedia; since the questionnaire had been designed as a sample, only the web pages in the genres of adventure and crime fiction have been developed, the implication being similar pages could be developed for the other genres as well;

v) since the chart on intrinsic motivation as well as the open-ended responses indicated that the students read primarily

for a measurable purpose, a fact that is borne out by the nature of the public exam system as well, it was felt by me that the website needed to be invested with a reading purpose; therefore, a discussion forum was included in the webpage where the students were supposed to discuss what they have read; a message too has been posted at the forum outlining that their reading would be assessed and their comments monitored; this, I felt, could provide a necessary motivation ('getting good marks' mot4) to the students as well as hopefully initiate them to the idea of reading for pleasure; the following is a screenshot of the page:

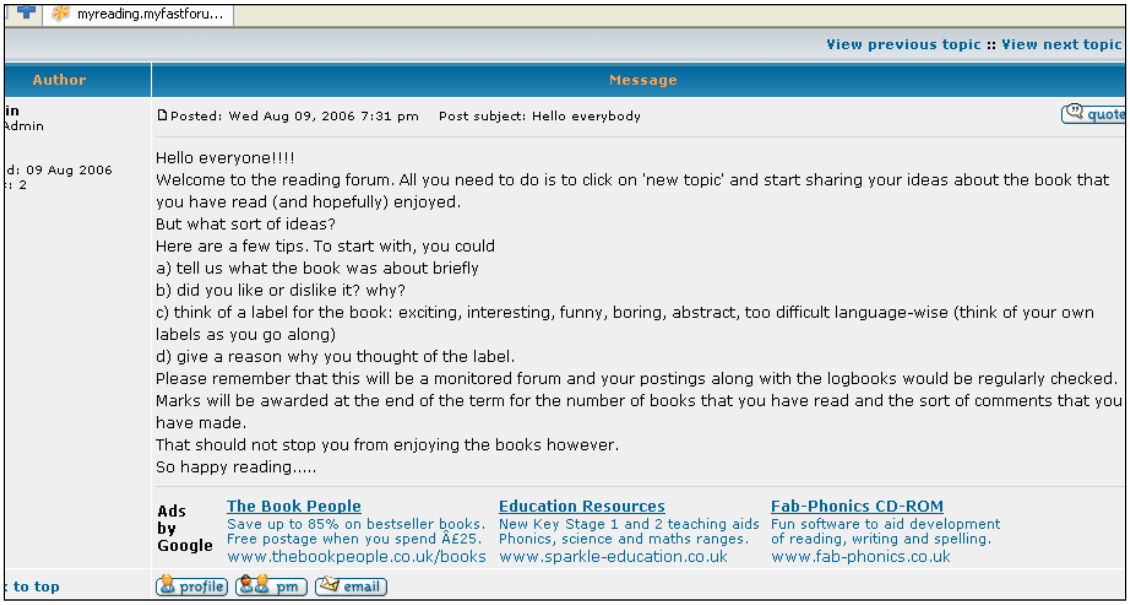

Fig 5.1 Screenshot of Reading Forum

vi) And finally, since in the analysis chapter, there was a strong extrinsic motivation that was found for 'reading for marks' (mot4), as well as a positive perception towards multimedia or external support for reading (sup2, sup4 and sup5), both were meant to be combined through the webpage; thus, based on what the students read in the SAC and the sort of comments that they post on the forum, an internal assessment system could be built up that would be formally added to the year-end marks of the students; in this way, the 'extra' reading that the students do can be accounted for within the assessment system as well as provide the necessary impetus beyond their prescribed course books.

What then are the implications of the findings of the previous chapter and the use of multimedia and SAC to motivate students for extensive reading as has been outlined here? In the next chapter, I will look at some of the implications and make certain suggestions as to how reading strategies, self-access and multimedia could be effectively combined to boost the students' motivation levels and make them successful readers. I will also point towards certain possible researches that could be carried out in the future.

Conclusion

though the students and teachers use a variety of web tools, there were still certain gaps that were thought could be taught within the context of the actual classroom pedagogy; for example the metacognitive strategy of prediction and confirming those predictions, the cognitive strategy of reading with a reasonable speed and the support strategy of peer reading could be actively engaged within the classroom;

Since the students and teachers have a positive attitude towards external support mechanisms, the self-access centre and web tools could be used effectively both for the purposes of extensive reading as well as, with the help of multimedia, an interactive forum for discussions and sharing of ideas; this could also lead to a development of the critical reading abilities that the students are required to develop for their literature papers;

Since the external assessment system and syllabus framing is beyond the control of the particular institution, the internal assessment system of 30% marks could be effectively organised around the web skills of the students and inset programmes can be organised for teachers; since there is a perception among the students that reading skills are important for developing listening and speaking, as seen earlier, the assessment system could be harnessed around this skill;

The SAC too needs to be refurbished with a fresh set of tools ranging over a greater variety of genres; some of the genres are under stocked

and some like newspapers and magazines do not find a place in the SAC at all; also for the purposes of extensive reading a larger collection of graded readers might be helpful; since the students do have an exposure to a wider variety of genres in their L1, the SAC could provide a similar exposure to them in their L2.

Also since the students seem to have a positive perception of the use of multimedia, it could be integrated more within the reading curriculum, so that the potential of the medium could be utilised to the maximum.

Conclusion

Can a well organised Self Access Centre be utilised with the help of multimedia and give a boost to reading habits among the students?

The strong positive perception that the students have towards multimedia (sup2, sup3, sup4) and general support (sup5) seems to indicate that multimedia can help to boost reading habits among the students. This also positively answers the research question ‘what is the students’ own perception of multimedia or general support provided to them for reading?’ However, one of the limitations of the study was that there were no indicators of the perception of the students towards the SAC since the questionnaire did not include

questions on self-access. As explained earlier, I had not included these questions since I thought that they would confuse the students, but in hindsight it seems that a study of these perceptions or attitudes could lead this study to a wider understanding of students' reading attitudes and possibly could have been linked to the strategies and motivation used while reading. A related lack within the study was the students' attitude towards their own course books prescribed in the syllabus and their opinions on the kind of books that they would like to read. This could have helped me to link their preferences to the kinds of books that they read in the present (in questionnaire items 5 and 8).

It was also found in the preliminary survey that the *online gradebook* is a tool that allows instructors to post grades so that students can view their own grades and see the grade distribution, including average, low, and top grades. Bar charts are used to show grade distribution.

Quiz is used here as a generic name for interactive online exercises. Instructors may design multiple-choice questions with immediate feedback, or employ such other options as short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, and fill-in-the-blank exercises.

Audio stream is a tool for asynchronous audio, which makes it possible for students to listen to pre-recorded messages via the Web.

Course syllabus is a course outline that details the subject area to be covered, required class projects, tests, readings, and other activities associated with the online course.

In the online *assignment submission box* students are asked to place class assignments so that the instructor can retrieve them.

The *student portfolio* can be accessed only by the individual student and the instructor. In the student portfolio, students keep class information, grades, and instructor's comments. In some systems, the student portfolio can also be accessed by administrators.

Usage statistics is a tool that collects usage data for each student and keeps track of the interactions in the classroom: when a message was written and to whom, how many messages a student has written, how many instructor's messages were received, the date and time when each student logged on and for how long, which classroom areas the student went to, and the time spent in each area.

The *class announcement tool* is used to send reminders of due dates for assignments, exams, and other class activities.

Recommendations for the Development of Online Tools

Instructors stated that their experience has shown that more functional, user-friendly tools are needed to support their teaching. Respondents also mentioned some of the tools they would like to see developed and made available, citing such features as instructional

design, role-play, debate organizer, plagiarism checking, brainstorming, conferencing with wireless application protocol (WAP), integrated spellcheckers, real-time group discussion, and analytical tools. An easy-to-use learning management system was also mentioned by many respondents as a tool they need.

The majority of the new tools or additional features recommended by instructors are related to the pedagogical and managerial roles of the online instructor. The online teaching workload—that is, the amount of time spent teaching online compared with the amount of time spent teaching (and preparing classes) in the place-based classroom—is an important issue as well. As most respondents stated that they dedicate more time to managerial functions when teaching online, they also observed that their teaching workload is greater in the online classroom. This remains consistent with our previous findings (Teles et al., 2000), which indicated that managerial tasks took up more time than the provision of instruction. Among the reasons that may explain their present observations are an absence of administrative or technical support, poor design of some tools and delivery platforms, or lack of training programs to teach instructors how to use tools to support online teaching.

While some educational institutions are beginning to provide support for online instructors, this process is still in its early stages and there

are no comprehensive, generally accepted policies to support online instructors.

Results also point to the need for new research to investigate the use of tools for online teaching: what online teaching tasks can be supported by tools, how these tools can support instructors who want to develop their own instructional methodologies, and how improved evaluation tools can support online instructors in classroom monitoring and student assessment.

Instructional tools that are too complex to learn or too time consuming are less attractive for instructors than those that are more intuitive and easy to use. More studies are needed to assess the value of the most commonly used instructional tools and to identify areas for development in the ways these tools can support online instructors.

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