E-learning and Language in NIT Raipur and RIT RAIPUR C.G.INDIA

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Abstract. This article explains a little of the know-how of web-based *Language teaching and learning* at National Institute of Technology Raipur and Raipur Institute of Technology, Raipur, concentrating mainly on the 2009-10 running of the course, which was taught in an experimental way using web application . It focuses on the experience and only briefly presents some degree of the socio-linguistic and cultural context of Raipur. A particularly important qualitative resource was the monthly feedback form on the web-site developed and managed by the students and a weekly self development report presented by the students to the department of English at NIT Raipur. This article concludes at the students want to hang on to the major features of the traditional lecture and tutorial approach to teaching, but along with this they value the interactive dimension of the web-based approach being it easily accessible and encouraging.

Keywords: Computer-Assisted Learning; Cross-Cultural Communication; E-Learning; Learning through a Second Language; Web-Based Learning

1. Introduction

This article explains the experience of teaching and learning web-based *Language* in a blended format at National Institute of Technology Raipur. To help readers understand the experiences of my students and myself, we provide a brief overview of the socio-linguistic situation in which my students participate by virtue of being natives of the Raipur the capital of Chhattisgagh a newly constituted state of India (I myself have been a resident of Raipur, teaching at NIT RAIPUR, for 03 years .I had always been actively involved in teaching English as a second language for last 12 years). For a big part of the population of Raipur, Chhattisgarhi, a regional language of India, is first language. In the 2001 census, 85.1 percent of the population claimed to speak Chhattisgarhi, 54.1 percent Hindi, the national language of India promoted by the government of India, and 10 percent Uria, Bengali and Marathi.

For most of Raipur's history, English, the language of the colonial power, was the sole official language. Raipur is a modern, liberal, capitalist society, where Hindi is the official language and English has an officially recognized role. Although Chhattisgarhi and Hindi are the language of both home and work for a big section of society, yet English still has a major role to play in professional education especially technical education, banking documentation, trade and commerce and in high courts. Educated people have adopted a dual mode of communication they speak Chhattisgarhi and Hindi but write in English .With the emergence of mobile phone and internet people use English for their written communication as typing English is much more easier than or of Chhattisgarhi and Hindi. Internet usage has grown rapidly in Raipur in the past few years. Different assessments put the proportion of Raipurians regularly surfing the internet from home computers at 30-40 percent (Hitwaad) There are a number of popular, local, Indian-language web pages, and also some English ones that have a degree of popularity. Many institute students favour English- rather than Indian-language email.

2. Teaching Language at NIT RAIPUR

I prepared a course in **Professional Communication in English** (ENG 5811) in the department of English at NIT RAIPUR for the past 03years. Our department has a dual focus in English language and Professional Communication. ENG 5811 is a compulsory course to both first and second semester students of the undergraduate B.Tech. degree(at NIT RAIPUR it takes four years) and MCA students. The students primarily interested in language have all done the required introductory courses in language at school level .They are exposed to some basic level of social and professional communication but that is limited to common dialogue and conversation level.

Up to and including 2008–9, ENG 5811 was taught in the traditional way three lectures of 50 minutes with a tutorial of 100 minutes in a week.

3. Implementation of the Course

I planned for web-based *Language teaching* during the 2008–9 academic year .Because I was dissatisfied with the traditional format, finding it difficult to reach to the last student which belonged to different levels and were supposed to be successfully trained in communication skill within 120 hours class. I discussed with my colleague Prof. Sudhakar Pandey to find out a solution through which I could reach to my last student with 11% impartation. On this he suggested to come up with a web based learning system at our Institute's server.   In 2009-10 I continued to teach the traditional course but also allowed an alternative course whereby those students who so wished could take web-*based Language learning,* a partially web-based course. Out of a total of 80 students 40 did so. This trial helped me to become familiar with the *Language teaching* materials and modus-oprendi and observe how students took the web-based course and reacted to it. I noted informally that there was a tendency for the more able students to opt for the web-based course. After this familiarization, s I used web-based *Language teaching with* all my students in 2010-11 winter semester. My friend Alok Mishra framed a similar group at RIT an institute providing technical education.

I intended to use these two groups at NIT and RIT, for comparative purposes, experimental control group. As both the institutes provide technical education so the need of communication skill is equal in both the institutes but the background of prior education of the student differs very much yet their inclination could be scaled as the material exposed to them was same.

It was thus clear that, if I wanted to get an indication of the effectiveness of web-based language teaching, it was not possible to do so by means of a purely quantitative approach. The approach would have to be partly qualitative, with the quantitative indications provided by answers to questionnaires administered to the students.

`My initial plan for the 2009-10 courses was that the course material would be split into two. The units which could be converted into objective type of question were chosen to be put for web-based learning .Then the subject matter was divided into five objectives –reading, writing, speaking .listening and understanding. First language was used to simplify and speed up the learning process. NIT, being a national institute and due to numerous reservations, houses students from various linguistic atmosphere and different academic level. So evaluating their growth on traditional scale was not of much worth. So students were exposed to a test which tested their psychometric attention, sociological imagination cross-cultural and second language level. Based on the result students were divided into three groups i.e. beginner, learner and advance learner.

The tutorial sessions would also take place in internet-connected classrooms, allowing the students to go online *Language learning* and further discuss issues on line desk or with myself.

In order to get a deeper insight into the students' responses to the course I changed the usual assessment scheme somewhat. Instead of a test paper the students were required to write a weekly self development report, together with the usual end-of semester examination. It was emphasized that what was being looked for in weekly report was not a display of the student's knowledge but an account of their experience and learning from the course. The bases for my qualitative investigation was weekly self development report and my own interaction with the students and questionnaires. The overall aim was to gain an understanding of the students' experience.

4. Pre-Course Questionnaire: Familiarity With the Web

In this section I compare NIT RAIPUR 2008-9 responses with RIT 2008-9 responses to the same questions concerning how long they had been using the world-wide web. For the RIT students, the average years of experience of the internet was 3.5, for the NIT RAIPUR students it was 6. The NIT RAIPUR students seem to have been a much more online community than the RIT students.

Yet when asked whether they felt confident about using the world-wide web 91 percent of the RIT students responded 'Yes' but only 71 percent of the NIT RAIPUR students did so. This response seems surprising at first sight, given the NIT RAIPUR students considerably greater experience of the internet, and suggests a lower level of general confidence.

The higher percentages of NIT RAIPUR students expressing excitement and/or interest arguably reflects a greater sense of ease with the internet, due to their considerably greater experience of it. Nevertheless, the percentage of NIT RAIPUR students expressing worry is almost twice that of the RIT students, suggesting a lower level of general self-confidence.
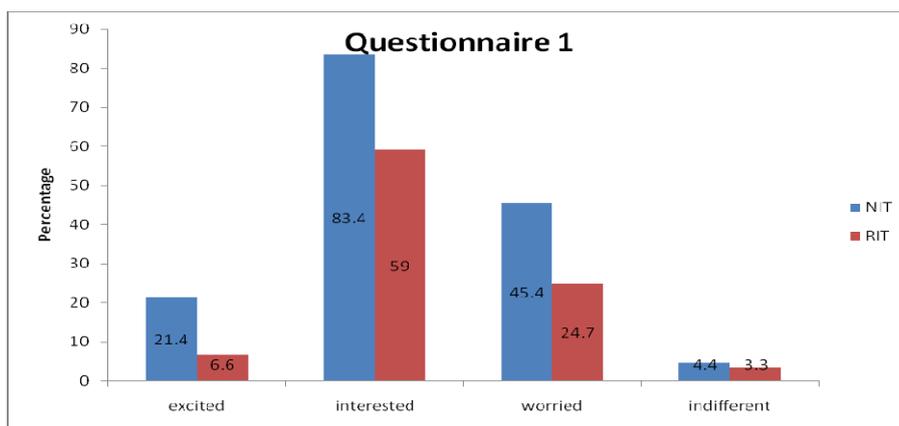
Note : Students were permitted to tick more than one category .

Fig. 1: Comparison of students' reaction about the vista of the course in NIT and RIT IN 2008-9 (%)

5. End-of-Course Questionnaire

Responses to the post-course questionnaire were received from 81.4 percent of the RIT 2008-9students but only 58 percent of the NIT RAIPUR students. For the NIT RAIPUR students this represents a slightly higher rate of non-attendance at the end of a course than usual. The need to work so much on the course on the net outside class time presumably accounts for this.

NIT RAIPUR students have used the extremes of the scales less than the RIT students, perhaps suggesting a cultural difference with respect to comfortableness with explicit course evaluation or perhaps reflecting the fact that cultural and linguistic differences would have made the course somewhat less accessible for them.
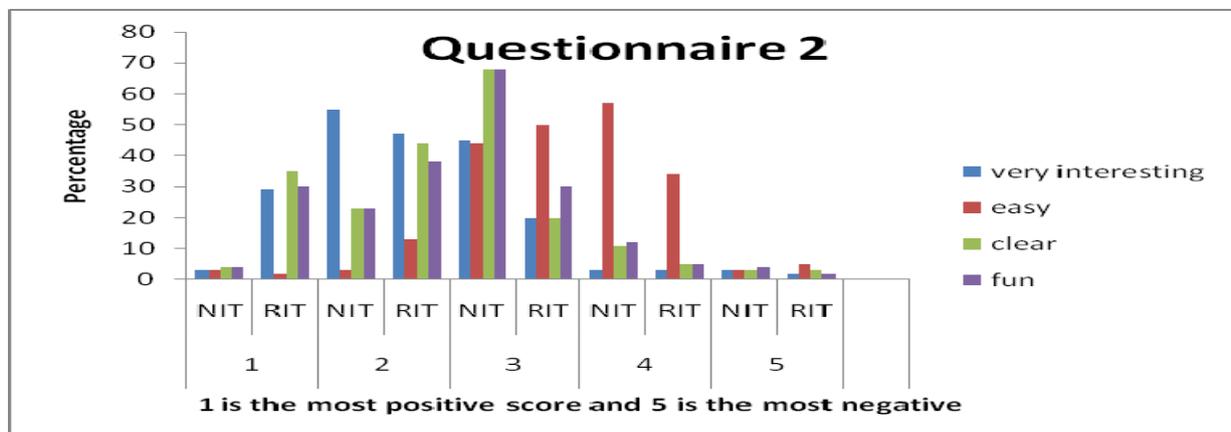

Fig. 2: Comparison of NIT 2009-10 and RIT 2009-10 student response to the course overall (%) What is your general opinion of the course overall?

6. Changes to be made

Overall I feel that using the web course has been worthwhile and I intend to continue using it. In 2012-13 I shall employ the revised teaching format with the major innovation . I will, of course, explain carefully to the students why I am doing this and will encourage the students to look at topics by themselves to see if they need to revise any of the material, and the students to work through them more carefully on their own, coming to me individually to discuss any issues on which they need clarification.
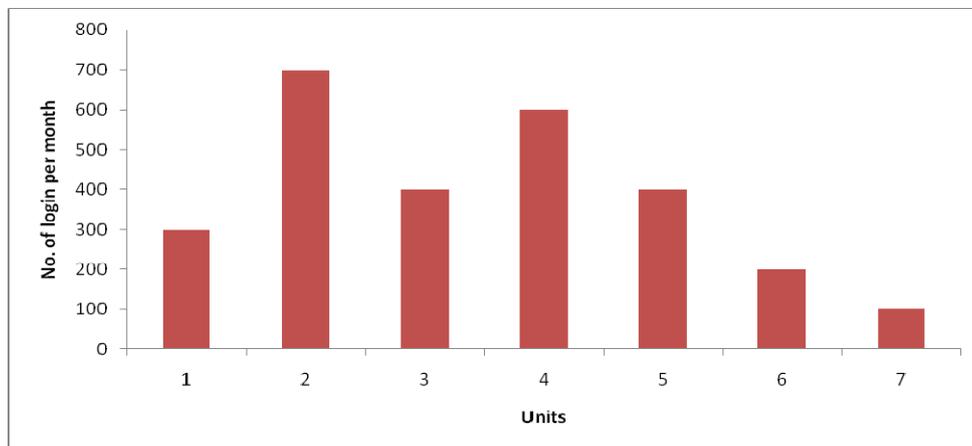
Fig.3: Comparision among the units hit per month.

I will support part 3, 6 &7 of the web-based course with lecture as very poor record of attempt was found. These parts deal with listening and composition and were not very interactive but play major role in communication skills While clearly wanting to retain the pedagogical direction and human contact of the traditional approach, the students also seem to value greatly the new interactive dimension of learning provided by the web course.

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