E-CONCORDANCE: A BLENDED LEARNING PRACTICE FOR TEACHING ORIENTAL LANGUAGES & LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Concordance is a search tool giving list of all the words along with text in which they are used by an author in a published work. Both printed and electric concordances of certain holy books such as Bible, Quran, or renowned literary works like that of Shakespeare’s in English, or of Rumi’s in Persian and Iqbal in Urdu etc. are prepared. Concordance is usually used to get comparatively quicker access to a certain published content to study the literary style of that very author. It is experienced that this tool can be effectively useful to teach language as well. This study is made to assess the effectiveness and challenges of using e-concordance as a research tool to teach oriental languages and literature. This study is limited to the concordances of Allama Iqbal’s poetic works in Persian and Urdu languages only. Both electronic and printed concordances of both the Persian and Urdu poetic works of Allama Iqbal are available. It has been observed that printed concordances are found comparatively more effective in terms of accuracy of results than that of e-concordance. A serious focus is recommended to develop both printed and e-concordances of more and more published classical and modern work.

Keywords: E-Concordance; Oriental Literature; Languages; Research Tool; Allama Iqbal; Urdu; Persian; CALL; ICT; BLL; NUML

INTRODUCTION:

In blended learning, student learn through online and electronic media along with traditional face to face learning-teaching practices. E-concordance is selected as an electronic medium to be used in blended learning, to see it effects. Concordance is an alphabetical list of the principle words in a book or the works of an author, with reference to the passages in which they occur [1]. So, it has lists of all words the writer is known to have used.

The published text is the eventual basic source of the entries in a concordance. The base text is the authority for what the contents of a concordance contains. It is the ultimate alternative of the concordance user for the information that is not found in the concordance. Contents of a concordance is another form given to the
actual text by a concordance editor and the user studies this rearranged material and refers back finally to the original literary text [2].

There are people with the persistence and patience to pursue such long, detailed project manually, e.g. Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath prepared Concordance to the Septuagint and the other Greek versions of the Old Testament, ISBN: 0801021413. There are concordance-writing programs available, such as: OCP [Oxford Concordance Program] or Literary Concordances: A Complete Handbook for the Preparation of Manual and Computer Concordances by [2].

**Importance of e-Concordances in blended Learning Strategies:**

The growing interest in statistical analysis of language led almost unavoidably to demands for concordances in which every occurrence of every word in a corpus of writing was characterized in the concordance. The strongest argument for the provision of an illustrative context for every occurrence of every word in the concorded text is supplied by the requirement of literary statistics [2].

According to Warschauer as cited in [3], he divided the development of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into three phases: behaviouristic CALL, communicative CALL and integrative CALL (multimedia and the internet) [3].

The behaviouristic phase CALL focuses on repetitive drills and practice, allowing students to learn at their own pace, with the computer acting as a mechanical tutor, continuously repeating drills. The communicative phase of CALL with approach on language acquisition as a natural, communicative process, rather than a function of repetition and drills. Integrative/Explorative CALL, incorporates the teaching of language skills into tasks or projects to provide direction and rationality [4].

Rižnar in his study: “Blended language learning in tertiary education”, has favoured recent research in CALL a learner-centered explorative approach, where students are encouraged to try different possible solutions to a problem, for example, the use of concordance programs. This approach is Data-Driven Learning (DDL), whereby learners gain insights into the language that they are learning by using concordance programs to locate authentic examples of language in use. In DDL, the learning process is no longer based solely on the teacher’s initiative, his/her choice of topics and materials and the explicit teaching of rules, but on the learner’s own discovery of rules, principles and patterns of usage in the foreign language. In other words, learning is driven by authentic language data [3].

Some language teachers believe that the traditional literacy skills are threatened by the use of computers and they emphasize on and practice traditional method, by the time there are growing number of younger language teachers who are aware of the fact that ICT is changing the ways in which languages can be taught so they try to blend their teaching techniques. This study was carried out to find the answers to the following questions in the context of learning/teaching oriental languages:
1. What are the challenges of using printed and e-concordances?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Blended Language Learning /teaching?

METHODOLOGY

It is an exploratory design research applied on one class, with no earlier studies to refer or to rely upon to gain insight in preliminary stage of investigation [5]. For this study, use of mobile phones and laptops was encouraged to make use of e-concordances. At the Department of Persian Studies, Faculty of Languages, National university of Modern languages, Islamabad, Pakistan, students of MA level (Persian), third semester, session spring 2019 were introduced with blended learning practices in their course titled Iqbal Studies (course code: PER-534).

Instructions to Students

Initially students were introduced with the use of printed concordance as an effective research tool and search engine of an author’s works (Iqbal in this case). Later for learning motivation and to introduce blended learning strategies in classroom environment while teaching poetic works of Allama Iqbal during the course of Iqbal studies, the students’ computer and internet literacy was inquired, as well as their satisfaction with the online activities such as internet skills, e-mail skills, the amount of time that they spend on the internet and their awareness of the different services provided on the internet were discussed. They practiced use of both the printed and e-concordance of Allama Iqbal’s Persian and Urdu works. Following printed and e-concordances of Iqbal were introduced to them:

1. a very useful website to search works of Persian poets [6].
2. a useful site to search Urdu Poetic works of Iqbal [7].
3. “Kashf-ul-alfaz”,[8] a printed handmade concordance of Allama Iqbal’s Persian works, by Dr. Sajid Ullah Tafhimi.

To study the poetic thoughts, like “Iqbal’s philosophy of Self”, it is important to reach the basic text first to be analysed. Iqbal wrote both in Persian and Urdu languages. Traditional way to get to know the complete picture of his philosophy of “Self” is to go through his whole poetry that is around 9000 Persian and 6000 Urdu poetic verses. That is definitely a time taking task. A comparatively less time consuming way is to use indexes and printed handmade concordances, that is third above given reference. Students tried using this tool. Challenge with printed concordance is its huge volume and weight to deal with and it is a reference book so hardly more than one of its copies are available in university library. This is where blended approach of learning was required and used. Students were guided step by step to use above given e-links of e-concordances on works of Allama Iqbal.
Performance was assessed through assignment given to students. On the whole, the adjustment to this new form of learning was judged as mostly unproblematic. Over all the students’ attitude towards the Blended Language Learning (BLL) experience was positive. They showed interest in using their gadgets like mobile phones and laptops to complete their assignment. The use of this blended learning/teaching technique was aimed to motivate students by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

E-concordance has certain challenges. Firstly, this edition is available only online and not in a printed form. Secondly its search engine cannot differentiate certain words from their other word forms. It also shows all the results in which that asked word is shown as part of spellings of entirely different word which even does not belong to the same word family.

For example, during this study, to teach philosophy of “Self” or “Ego”, the word, baz (both in Persian and Urdu), i.e. eagle (a bird) is a symbol of self-determination in poetry of Iqbal. The word "baz", is searched through Urdu e-concordance search engine. Results show 75 occurrences (‘baz’ shown in red colour) of this word. Analysis of this result is given on Table I.

| Occurance of word | Meanings       | Grammatical term   | Frequency/75 | Relevance |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------|
| ba zamana         | With time/society | Preposition+noun | 3            | No        |
| ba zameen         | with land/soil   | Preposition+noun   | 1            | No        |
| ba zar            | with gold        | Preposition+noun   | 1            | No        |
| Baz               | eagle            | Noun               | 3            | Yes       |
| baz               | Again            | Adverb             | 3            | No        |
| Baz               | Open             | Adjective          | 1            | No        |
| baz aaya          | I abstain        | Verb               | 1            | No        |
| Bazan             | eagles           | Noun(plural)       | 1            | Yes       |
| Bazar             | market           | Noun               | 7            | No        |
| bazeecha          | Playground       | Noun               | 1            | No        |
| bazi              | Game             | Noun               | 5            | No        |
| bazaar            | game yard        | Noun               | 1            | No        |
| bazu              | arm              | Noun               | 10           | No        |
| bazyabi           | you will find    | Verb               | 1            | No        |
| behrbazi          | to play in sea   | Noun               | 1            | No        |
| ishqbazian        | to love          | Noun               | 1            | No        |
| janbaz            | Valiant          | Adjective          | 3            | No        |
| karishmabazon     | magician         | Noun(plural)       | 1            | No        |
| khaakkbazi        | playing with soil| Noun               | 3            | No        |
Table I shows 33 different words in which word ‘baz’ as a part of spellings of different words with different meanings can be observed such as in the word ‘bazar’ meaning market or shopping place and so on. Again, this very word spelled as baz, other than being name of bird has two more meanings and that are of, ‘again’ and ‘open’. Out of 75 results found through the search engine of e-concordance of Urdu poetry of Allama Iqbal, only 16 are relevant in studying the philosophy of self through studying the characteristics of the bird, eagle.

But this error is useful in a way too. For instance, for teaching applied grammatical term “homograph” in language teaching through e-concordance. As in this case example of “baz”, is a homograph, a word with same spellings and pronunciation but three different meanings. Such errors are less observed in handmade printed concordances as editor can deal with text with homographs in under different headings.

The reflection on above challenges of using e-concordance in teaching oriental languages and literature is of the view that the hand-made concordances usually are more accurate and have fewer irritating false-hits due to transcription errors by scanners and typists. E-concordance is a fun filled learning tool but with amazing experience, time efficient and productive activity. Yet e-concordance results are subject to be critical analysis having possible errors mentioned above.

The pedagogic functions of this BLL are:
- to enhance students’ motivation
- to help students reflect their objectives, ways of learning and success in language learning
- to help students learn independently
- to encourage students to enhance their language experience

ICT based learning/teaching environments provide different ways of learning and the construction of a potentially richer learning environment. It provides fresh approaches to learning caterers for different learning styles, as well as allows for greater diversification in learning and greater access to learning.

In this study, the following strengths of BLL/teaching were identified:
- enables self-study with authentic content most of the time
- helps create documentation and may help reduce ambiguity
- may be used by many people at the same time
- preferred for convenience, retention and efficiency in research
- promotes a learner-centered approach
- promotes independent learning
- promotes lifelong learning

On the other hand, the following weaknesses of BLL were identified in our cultural and environmental context:
- information overload (students can receive too difficult, unwanted or irrelevant information that is of little use to them)
- institution lacking well equipped ICT lab
- loss of context
- minor technical problems may occur
- motivation problems (especially for students with poor language skills)
- not having personal gadgets to use
- unavailability of internet connection
- inability to handle unexpected situations

CONCLUSIONS

This study was made in oriental language learning context which is first of its kind as far as teaching Iqbal studies is concerned. Yet its results can apply to the teaching of other international languages too, as Allal-Sumoto in a study titled: “Concordance Programs in the EFL Classroom” counts the uses of concordance from the viewpoint fluency, amount of exposure, acquisition of collocation and memory but also narrates that despite the usefulness of the using concordance, a concordance is not always appropriate and it has also been observed that it is not easy to retrieve, analyse and apply concordance. It is affirmed that it can used as an example in vocabulary and grammar teaching [9].

Printed concordances are usually huge in volume and not easy to be carried along. Again, availability of printed concordance is comparatively limited than that of e-concordance, yet it is strongly recommended to consult both the concordances of a certain published work for best results. Certainly e-concordance is a faster mode of searching certain published text yet there are chances of missing a certain
result while using an e-concordance but a seriously designed and printed concordance can meet the challenges faced while using an e-concordance.

Teaching and learning is not less complex with new technologies; yet, it is richer and more demanding. The technology-enhanced Persian learning/teaching practice at the Faculty of Languages NUML, strengthens the belief that blended learning/teaching should be further developed and offered to post-graduate students because it involves the learning process, which is learner-centered. The language environment provides the learners with learning stimuli for both language competence and new contents and reflections on language, as well as on the aspects of the learning process. This experiment was to provide a more flexible approach to language learning.

By taking the above into consideration, these findings impact educators, as well as their choice of instruction media. Teachers should seek the most effective and efficient media (both print and e-concordance in this case) for different teaching tasks. The main contribution of this paper is that it demonstrates in what way new technologies and computer-assisted BLL can be considered as a sound contribution to the improvement of the learning process, because they offer richer sources of language learning materials and more flexible and open learning tools. The innovativeness of the blended language experience that was described in this paper lies in its enrichment and deepening of course content, time savings and higher student motivation, which is similar to the findings reported by other researchers such as [3]. One of the main benefits of online resources is their accessibility wherever a computer and an internet connection are available. This greatly widens the reach of learning and teaching materials and resources and opens up a whole new range of ideas, activities and information to students, regardless of where they are situated.

The research was limited to full-time but lesser number of students. Future research should include this experiment of teaching oriental language and even Occidental languages too, to class of greater population of students. Homographs were taught in this study, in future studies experiments can be made to teach further aspects of grammar in language teaching. Technology-enhanced methods and activities for classroom instruction should be used in order to promote the development of the linguistic, cultural, practical, interpersonal and communicative competencies of students.

Use of concordances is not very common in many countries, there for further research and application of effective teaching blended strategies seem to be needed.
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