

# A Paradigm shift in Language Learning

On November 1, 2007, the ICASL declared open its first ever Multimedia English Language Centre (MELC)



English Language Co-ordinator Achala Kodikara

This centre was the result of the institute's effort to bridge the soft skills gap of its students and perspective members.

It was funded under the IRQUE project of the World Bank and its objectives include the improvement of language competency and communication skills, increasing language confidence and implementing learner autonomy.

According to English Language Co-ordinator Achala Kodikara, "The idea and the concept of a

The center is presently open five days a week from 0900 to 1700 but we hope to extend the opening hours during weekends also. Kodikara also tells me about the autonomous learning side of this computer assisted language learning centre. "The students are all adults and have the freedom to choose what modules they wish to follow, depending on their language needs. This form of learner autonomy is unique in the Sri Lankan educational sector. This centre promotes the concept of self-learning. I can access the students'

"Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand."

- Confucius

language lab is obsolete. We have moved forward beyond a language lab. People think that this is still a language lab. It is Network Based Computer Assisted Language Learning centre where learning takes place through networked computers."

There is a famous saying by Chinese philosopher Confucius... "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand." This was seen as the inspiration when it came to establishing this programme.

Kodikara continues, "Hearing about or seeing something amounts to only 20% of the learning experience, but involvement adds up to the remaining 80%. Before embarking on this project I had to undertake learner requirements gathering information and consulting the key stakeholders in the process that was to include students, council members and lecturers. It was only after this that I developed the course that the students would offer." The center today offers English modules from beginner to advance level.

The MELC has 20 networked PCs that run customised software packages designed in the UK.

PCs, and monitor their progress while facilitating learning. If anyone is having any difficulty, they can buzz me on my screen, so that I either can chat with them, or talk to them over the mike."

The centre is presently open for students at F2 and passed finalist level. In the future, it is also hoped to amalgamate this programme with the communication skills programme (two-day workshop), that is



The Computer Assisted Language Learning Lab.

compulsory for those candidates waiting to become members.

It is understood that a language cannot be learned overnight, thus the recommended modules should be completed over a 80-hour learning period. This formulates to at round 60% self learning, with teacher intervention adding up to the remaining 40%. The course at MELC will be compulsory and the Institute is offering this service as it sees English as the key to career progression and long-term sustainability.

The first group at the centre is a pilot one, and

their feedback will ensure changes are made to match the needs of future students.

Kodikara adds, "The idea is for students to improve their language competency and communication skills to gain better jobs. We focus on sustainable development, career guidance, and an environment to update their knowledge."

The centre allows the diverse learning styles that are used by students. This may involve learning by either voice, video, or text. This is indeed a paradigm shift from traditional teaching where students are spoon-fed information.

"It is hoped that upon successful completion of Business Communication English I and II, students will be at a higher proficiency level of English, that would help them to follow the Chartered Accountancy Course successfully, and to gain attractive jobs."

## New Syllabus – New Learning Material



Kanchana Gunasekera  
Manager - Education



(Right): One of the new textbooks

Gunasekera continues, "The editors had very strict recommendations that we plan to stick to. It recommends that students be limited to 35 per class, and sessions are a minimum of two and a half hours a day, totalling to a minimum of 60 hours per student by the end of the course." The Open University team will also develop formal assessment.

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The institute plans to retail the books, in order to attract interest from accountancy students outside the institute. It is hoped in the future to hold a seminar for teachers on how to make maximum use of the new books.

The institute updates its syllabi every four - five years, and the result of this was the production of new textbooks entitled, English For Accountancy, edited by Hemamala Ratwatte, Winitha Jayawardhana, and Sylvia Fernando of the Open University. These are designed for the courses, Business Communication English I and II.

The books have eight units each, and each unit begins with the aims and objectives of that relevant unit. According to Kanchana Gunasekera, Manager - Education, "English is the need of the generation, and we wanted to update our learning methods and technology, and this book and the Network Based Computer Assisted Language Learning Centre are all a step towards this."

The books were funded on a 50/50 basis, with the institute footing half the costs, while the IRQUE fund of the World Bank covered the rest.



ICASL President Yohan Perera hands over a copy of the new textbook to Hon. Bandula Goonewardene, Minister for Consumer Affairs.