Transition to an Innovative ELT Classroom

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Abstract

Technology has intervened in every discipline of Education. It has supremely modernized learning and teaching atmosphere. Therefore, English Language Teaching is not an exceptional. ELT has been transformed greatly because of influx of technology. ELT which has a very short history of 300 years has been evolved to a great extent due to digitalization. A range of different methods, techniques and approaches were adopted through the years to meet with the needs of learners. ELT started its journey with Classical Method and now has entered the most dynamic phase of its evolution where ICT is dominating in learning and teaching. Due to the excessive use of ICT in ELT, now this field of study offers several innovative techniques and tools to the learners and teachers of English. In this study digital innovations in ELT are discussed .These innovative tools have entirely reshaped ELT.

Keywords: Innovations, English Language Teaching, E-Learning, Digital Tools in ELT, Physical Classroom.

Introduction

Technology has immensely affected every walk of life. It has incredibly revolutionized the life of human beings in many ways. The thinking process and living style of man has changed to such an extent that without technology it seems impossible to survive in this modern age. On the one hand, there is technology which has become the necessity of life. On the other hand, English is the requirement for the survival of professionals in this new era of technology and knowledge. The amalgamation of technology and English is introducing and opening new horizons of learning and teaching.

In this article we will discover how technology has digitalized English language teaching and where it is leading and what would be the future prospects of English language teaching. In the first part of the article, a short history of ELT will be covered and in the second part of the article the use of technology in ELT would be explored.

The teaching of English has evolved tremendously as compared to other disciplines. The teaching methods of Physics and Mathematics would be more or less same as used to be in the past but perhaps this is not the case with English.

History of English Language Teaching

If we have a bird's eye view on the historic background of English language teaching, we will come to know that it was not as dynamic and vibrant as it has become now a days because of the advent of technology.

It is traced with a careful examination and estimate that history of ELT is of only 300 years old (Moore, 2013). During 15th to 16th century when British Empire was growing, the need to teach English in an efficient manner to the higher authorities was felt in order to communicate with other governments, colonies and businesses. At that time foreign language learning was also connected with the learning of Latin and Greek to promote intellectuality. Tutors were hired to teach English to the high officials in the same manner as classical Latin and Greek were taught with the help of Classical Method. In this method, (Thanasouls, 2011) language was taught through grammatical rules, syntactic structure, and rote memorization of vocabulary and translation of some literary texts.

Late in 19th century, Classical Method was started to be called Grammar Translation Method. In this method reading and writing were given more importance as compared to speaking and listening. Rather only reading and writing were focused.

Charles Berlitz posited Direct Method (Thanasouls, 2011) at the end of 19th century and from that time till the beginning of 20th century, this method enjoyed great popularity due to the following points (Thanasouls, 2011).

a. The medium of instruction should be the target language.
b. There should be least focus on translation.
c. Language should be taught naturally with the help of specific situation.
d. Little grammar should be focused. If grammar is really required, the approach should be inductive.
e. Only everyday vocabulary should be used.
f. Vocabulary should be taught with the help of pictures.

This method had stayed in practice for a good period of time due to its focus on the functional use of English. But, still this method was marred with setbacks like there were many issues with this method. It needed a lot of time, good budget and a small class size. And even in some situations, it was not very useful. These issues led to another Method that is called Audio-Lingual Method.

Audio – Lingual Method was introduced in 1950s and it is also called "Army-Method" (Thanasouls, 2011) because of the happening of Second World War. This was the time, when Americans felt the need of knowing the languages of their enemies and allies. To achieve this purpose special language teaching centers were established where these personnel were taught other languages than English. In the history, this time period was also marked by the emergence of behaviorists in psychology and the development of science. So, all these things paved the way for ALM. The main characteristics (Thanasouls, 2011) of this method are presented in the following lines:

a. Usage of tapes and visual aids
b. No grammar

   c. Vocabulary should be taught in context
   d. Use of behaviorist models like conditioning and habit-formation models in ELT
   e. Pronunciation is focused more
   f. Prompt reinforcement of correct responses
   g. Practice, practice and practice

In 1964, this method was objected because of its main shortcoming of lack of communication. Now we are heading towards Communicative Language Teaching. But in between there stayed some other methods for a shorter period of time and their inclusion in this discussion will be interesting.

Inspired by Soviet psychological researches on Yoga and extra sensory perceptions, Bulgarian psychiatrist-educator, Georgi Lozanov proposed Suggestopedia (Barlinkaesuma, 2011). In this Method relaxation is used as a tool to learn and retrieve material and knowledge. Lozanov suggested that learner should be provided with comfortable seat. Vocabulary, readings, role plays and drama are presented to the students and music is played in the background in this method and in this way learners become "suggestible" (Thanasouls, 2011).

In 1970s there appeared another method that is called The Silent Way based on problem - solving approach to learning (Thanasouls, 2011). Here, students are given a task and teacher stayed at distant and students co-operate with one another to solve the task.
Suggestopedia and The Silent Way received much criticism. But their proponents are of the view that these methods give great weight to the psychological factors in language learning. The Communicative Language Teaching lays emphasis on the communicative function of the language. It includes all aspects of language either they are related with theory or practice. Pragmatic and functional uses of language along with communicative competence are some of the features of CLT (Thanasouls, 2011).

Digital Innovations in ELT
Now at present time ELT has entered its new phase of evolution where inventions are emerging almost on daily basis. The application of digital technologies has turned into "normalized" (Bax, 2011) in present time. The use of electronic devices such as computers, tablets, laptops, smart phones has become a matter of daily routine. These digital devices are influencing all disciplines of learning in general and ELT in specific. Now, these devices have found a prominent place in ELT and have been proving as interesting and fruitful tools. Hence, it is ELT which has evolved to great extent due to the technology.

Traditional methods/approaches to teach English language are wedded and intermingled with technology in such a way that it seems impossible to keep them separate. Therefore, a new phase of ELT has come into view due to digital innovations.

CALL has been in practice for almost 30 years and now it is leading towards ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

From CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) to MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) is another remarkable development in ELT. The availability of bundle of applications, designed programs on smart devices are playing a vital role in ELT. Computers,

internet and Wi-Fi have shaped English language teaching to such an extent that there is influx and bombardment of new tools, techniques and methods. The authenticity and reliability of these applications are also taken into consideration in ELT. Many organizations offer a lot of smart devices applications, materials and tools to be used in ELT.

British Council offers many useful applications (Learn English Apps, 2013) to learn English. Some of them are LearnEnglish Grammar (UK edition), LearnEnglish Grammar (US edition), LearnEnglish Audio and Video, My WordBook 2, Elementary Podcasts, LearnEnglish Sorts World, Sounds Right, Johnny Grammar's Quizmaster, 60 Second Word Challenge and Premier Skills. These applications provide pack of diverse activities to learn English.

There is a wide range of digital technologies used in the ELT. Some of them are presented in the following lines:

1. Skype for education (https://education.skype.com/).
2. Video conferencing (JoinNet)
3. Interactive CDs
4. Interactive Books
5. Talking Pens
6. Blackboard (E-learning)
7. Voki (www.voki.com)
8. Laptop
9. Electronic Dictionaries
10. Electronic Translators
11. Power Point (Microsoft Office Suite)
12. YouTube
13. Edmodo (www.edmodo.com)
14. E-books
15. Facebook group (www.facebook.com)
16. Speakers especially designed to listening sounds
17. Projectors
18. Smartphone
19. Tablets
20. University Wi-Fi
21. Virtual Conferencing Rooms
22. Digital libraries

Some of the above mentioned technologies are best suited in writing skills like edmodo, translators, Microsoft office and dictionaries. Others help in reading like facebook and interactive books. Voki, Skype and speakers are effectively used in listening and speaking. Voki is a "speaking avatar"(Sean Kennedy and Don Soifer, 2013) and it permits users (teachers or learners) to record and devise their own avatar characters. In this way learners can practice lessons and dialogues in an innovative fashion. It is a highly recommended tool for teaching speaking.

Digital game-based Learning is another innovation being successfully experimented at present time in ELT. Young learners are engaged in different games to get exposure to basics of language. Students learn the language at play.

There was a time when internet was used only to get information but now it is used intensively to communicate with peers, siblings and professionals around the world. So, this shift from information to communication is actually a shift from reading to interaction. Here, Communicative language teaching is embedded with the "technology driven activities" (Motteram, 2013). This integration paves the way of ICT in ELT. The trend of using ICT in ELT is being practiced nowadays at a large scale.

Conclusion

Globalization has revolutionized ELT. ELT which started in Classical Period just to enhance intellect has become an applied scientific discipline. Different Methods, approaches and techniques were adopted by the practitioners according to the requirement in their times. Globalization and ICT have brought a number of innovations in ELT. A variety of e-tools are available to use and apply in ELT Laboratory. The use of electronic devices has digitalized language teaching. E-learning has brought e-evolution in ELT and it also connects learners with the international learners' community of English. Digital game-based learning motivates and encourages young learners to learn language creatively and at play. These innovations in ELT evoke a new picture of this discipline where the use of e-learning, electronic devices, e-tools, e-books, video-conferencing and ICT may minimize the need of physical classrooms or may replace them with virtual learning.

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