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Use of Technology and Innovative Practices in the ELT Classrooms

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Abstract:

In this highly competitive world, the race is on among the future employees to be well trained in communication skills and employability skills. Realizing this trend, colleges and universities started giving importance to the development of communication skills and soft skills. 'Skill development' has become the order of the day. For enhancement of communication skills, through ELT classroom, the incorporation of the new age technological tools besides the conventional methods of teaching is to be encouraged. In order to meet this demand, teachers ought to play the role of effective facilitators of English language learning by using innovative methods instead of the traditional methods of teaching-learning process. We can't do away with the textual materials but use of advanced technological tools to supplement their teaching needs to be encouraged. This paper studies how the use of technological tools like podcasts, mobile phones, Facebook, Wikis, blogs and Skype etc., improves LSRW skills. This paper also looks into various innovative practices that can be subtly intertwined in ELT classrooms from KG to PG classrooms.

Keywords: ELT Classroom, Technology usage, innovative practices.

Introduction

ELT classrooms have undergone a metamorphosis in the 21st century. They took a revolutionary leap in the right direction. The formal and conventional set up has given way to the modern mindset of including and incorporating technological tools to enhance language learning. Thus multimedia has become a major resource as well as a viable means of English Language Teaching. There are many multimedia resources that make ELT classes interesting, entertaining while being informative and educative in their approach.

Like mother tongue, the other tongues should be learnt by internalizing a language which is possible through acquisition of LSRW skills at a subconscious level. The integration of multimedia into language teaching initially began with phonographs, tape records and movies. Multimedia based teaching has become an integral part of the curriculum. Multimedia resources like podcasts, radio programmes, TV programmes, video podcasts, film, internet, readymade software etc., can be purchased and installed in the language labs.

Let us take a peek into various technological tools that can rightly assist us in English language teaching and learning.

Podcasts

A podcast is ‘a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar programme, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player’. A podcasts is a talk or dialogue or anything that is spoken and recorded. Anybody can listen to the podcast anywhere and any number of times. For learning pronunciation, word stress, intonation, conversations, role plays etc podcasts can be used with great success rate. Plenty of everyday conversations are available on the websites www.podomatic.com and www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts.

According to statistics released by Apple in 2013, there were 250,000 podcasts in 100 languages in the iTunes store alone. Raw voice, which tracks 20,000 shows, said the number of unique monthly podcast listeners has tripled to 75 million from 25 million five years ago. Podcast is here to stay and material from podcasts can be effectively used for improving communication ability.

CALL Lab

The introduction of the activity-oriented English language labs brought a remarkable change in teaching and learning of English. Software is designed keeping in view the industrial needs of the day and the student’s background. If the student is able to make use of these materials, he can grow beyond himself to meets the challenges that await him. Students are exposed to all the four languages skills i.e, LSRW Skills. There are different activities for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Recorded video presentations of Role Plays, GDs, Debates, Personal Interview etc., are provided. Orientation on phonetics is also provided with animated pictures besides a provision for recording their own pronunciation and hearing it. Software by M/s Globarena and M/s KVan is widely used for this purpose.

Mobile Phone Assisted Language Learning (MPALL)

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is highly helpful in honing language skills. Mobile devices like cell phones, personal digital assistants, smart phones, tablets etc are gaining immense popularity among masses as these devices are small, smart, portable, and comfortable to utilize. All these devices can be used in language classrooms easily. Students can listen to an audio file recorded on a mobile by replaying it and it can be sent as an MMS to other students’ mobiles for them to listen too. The most common application is SMS messages sent to students. There are also mobile android apps for learning English like ‘ESL Daily English’, ‘LearnEnglishApps’ of the British Council etc.

Teaching English Radio by British Council

According to <http://www.britishcouncil.in/teach/teachingenglish-radio-india>, “Teaching English Radio India is a series of twelve fifteen minute audio programmes providing advice and training on learner-centred teaching of English at a basic level. It is aimed at teachers of English working in schools in India with large classes, a lack of resources and few training opportunities.

The twelve programmes focus on developing specific learner-centred teaching approaches that Indian primary and secondary school teachers can use in their classrooms, as recommended by the National Curriculum Framework 2005 .”

One can listen to the programmes and download the materials. These are teacher support materials right from teaching reading, grammar structures, vocabulary etc. First the topic is explained then they make the students practice and encourage the students to use the language confidently.

TV

TV can be a very effective technological tool. Watching Hollywood movies can help a student pick up accent, right grammar and vocabulary. Recently, sub titles are being displayed for every movie. While watching the movie and listening to the dialogues, the students can also read the sub titles for gaining better understanding of the text and context of the movie. Watching BBC channel or our own NDTV or CNN IBN can help students strengthen their communicative ability especially with regard to their listening and speaking skills.

Speaking comes out well when there is proper listening. Students should be encouraged to listen to this type of news items and indulge in this type of conversations. Films can also be the best source of visual aids. They may be shown to the students and a speaking activity should be conducted in the classroom asking them to give a review of these movies.

Radio

Radio is another tool which can be successfully used for enhancing English speaking skills. For example, BBC India's Amarnath Tewary describes how the radio is being used in Bihar to teach English to school children. The Bihar Education Project, in collaboration with the Education Development Center (a US-based organization), launched this innovative teaching idea in order to improve literacy of the state.

Amarnath Tewary reports:

“The students are looking inquisitively at a radio set perched on a plastic chair in the middle of the classroom in the capital, Patna. They are all waiting for a new English lesson to begin – on the radio.

So, for half an hour, four days a week, millions of primary students in Bihar today learn English through this radio lesson.

The year-long interactive radio lessons are being broadcast by the four regional state-run All India Radio stations. The lessons cover seven million students attending 65,000 primary schools in all the 38 districts of the state.”

The benefits of such initiatives in Bihar are manifold as can be gauged from the following fact mentioned by Amarnath Tewary.

“Interestingly, backward and dirt-poor Bihar appears to be a trend setter here – a recent federal government report found that school students in the state are now faring better in English and mathematics than anywhere else in the country.”

Virtual Classroom

Virtual classroom is a web based self learning resource which provides good motivation to the students and also helps in the development of the skills such as Team work, Time

management and Writing. Virtual classrooms use software applications like web conferencing, to provide remote students with the ability to collaborate in real time.

OHP / LCD Projector/Smart Boards

“One picture is worth thousand words”, it is said. Pictures, graphs, drawings and other pictorial representations can be easily shown in the class with the help of OHP and/or LCD Projector. In most of the schools, smart boards have replaced black board / chalk and white boards. With the rapid advancement of technology, most of the professors put up their teachings notes online.

Blogs

Any individual can have his own blog. Blog is a type of website where a person can store his own data. For teachers, these blogs help in storing their teaching material, description of an event, teaching videos, teaching files etc., maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, description of events or other such material as graphic or video.

Blogs are an excellent means of communication. Blogging has become very popular, especially in the sphere of education. It becomes communicative and interactive when participants assume multiple roles as writers who write and post, as readers or reviewers who respond to other writers’ posts and as writer-readers who react to criticism of their own posts.

SMS

Brevity of words is the hallmark of SMS language. If language is meant to be intelligible, SMS is also a tool for learning communication. Communicators can use words, numbers, and letters of alphabets or emoticons. If the students chat with their friends or classmates by using good language, they can improve their proficiency. Model chats can be used in the classroom. We can even ask the students to read out their friends’ messages and do instant modifications and corrections.

You Tube

No one can underestimate the power of You Tube in developing LSRW skills. The teachers themselves can start their own You Tube channels through which they can teach these skills. Moreover, there are many videos which can be used in real time class room situations.

Facebook

It is erroneous to note that Facebook is just a social networking site. It can, positively, influence a student’s life. We can create real language learning through face book which has a group of its own. In fact, through chatting language can be taught and learnt.

News Papers and Magazines

News papers and magazines provide unlimited knowledge. It is the best source to master vocabulary of sports, urban life, rural life, movies, business, cultural views of experts and their discussions, language based puzzle games and translations and interpretations. We need not move from pillar to post in search of books for seeking information. These days, news e-papers, e-

books, e-journals etc., are available and they can be accessed at the click of a mouse. Lot of materials from newspapers and magazines can be used in English classrooms.

Wikis

A wiki is the most common web based resource for collaborative writing. One of the characteristics of wiki is that there is no issue of ownership of document. It can be used either within a private domain for collaborative writing within one group of students or within the public domain, most famously in the collaboratively created encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Class-notes can be shared on wikis and brainstorming, mind mapping, interpretation of picture etc. can be carried out as a part of group discussion skills outside the classroom.

Skype

It is the free Internet telephone service which promotes unlimited possibilities for the teachers and ESL students to collaborate with each other anywhere in the world. It brings immense opportunities for the students in the English language class to connect with the classes in other countries to practice their English language skills. Students can enjoy face-to-face language learning with native speakers. Skype in the classroom makes a global classroom possible. Through Skype the teachers can provide homework and can give feedback to the learners.

Conclusion:

It is only when the lessons are interesting and varied, and when students are encouraged to learn more about each other and the world through the medium of a new language, English language learners will make progress. It only means that students have the opportunity to interact, participate in authentic tasks, and have ample practice in the basic skills required to master verbal and written English. No single technique or approach works for every student, but they tend to succeed when they are interested in the process and motivated to participate. A good combination of any of these technological tools will create a kind of learning environment for facilitating right balance of LSRW skills among the present youth.

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