



USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS IN ELT CLASSROOMS OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This research paper would study the technology used in modern language classrooms of Pakistan and point out the best possible and innovative uses of these technologies in the language classroom for Pakistani teachers and students alike.

The main focus of this paper would be on improvising the speaking skills of the multilingual, multidiscipline Pakistani university students who come from both urban and rural backgrounds. Many universities still are not equipped with the high-tech technology which can support both teachers and students in learning English language. The paper would focus on the use of technology with an English language teacher's perspective for better teaching. The students would benefit from it as to how technology can help them in English language learning in classroom with instructions of teacher and in isolation when teacher is not present to direct them.

The methodology of this research paper would be holistic in nature i.e. including both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from observation, literature review and survey conducted on both students and teachers linked with ELT.

Key Terms: Innovative, Multilingual, Multidiscipline, High-tech Technology, Holistic

Research Paper:

Research Questions:

1-Can use of technology improve the speaking skills of students in language classroom with practice of various activities?

2-Can use of technology make learning of speaking skills interesting for students in a language classroom?

Objectives/Focus:

- 1- To improve speaking skills comprising of (independent variables like) accent/pronunciation via use of technology in the English language classroom.
- 2- To improve speaking skills comprising of (independent variables like) tenses/sentence structure via use of technology in the English language classroom.
- 3- To improve speaking skills comprising of (independent variables like) confidence/fluency via use of technology in the English language classroom.
- 4- To improve speaking skills comprising of (independent variables like) vocabulary via use of technology in the English language classroom.

Literature Review:

The use of technology in the classroom is a direct descendent of the historical relationship a teacher maintained with a student via blackboard. The blackboard has been replaced by many of its modern counterparts like multimedia, computer and TV (Shawcross, 2011). In the modern era the students are getting more equipped and closer to the internet than ever before. They socialize on net, play games, make friends and even work on net. The importance of internet cannot be ignored or minimized as the use shows. This day by day increasing use is also making them learn and use English as the main language in all aspects of internet use.

The technology has changed the dynamic of teacher and student since the introduction of technology based class structure. The instructor is more like a facilitator and classrooms are filled with peer discussion, knowledge exchange, curiosity and motivation where relaxed learning is going on (Shawcross, 2011). The students find much opportunity to gain knowledge from the computer and net providing communicative activities. They can enhance speaking skills by using media as a mediator and tool for learning innovatively (Chanthiramathi, 2011). The students are learning language by using mediums like email or chatting or web conferences with counterparts of different cultures and regions of the world making it more interesting by even discussing literature, film, social conditions and cultural norms (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

Internet can be a source of fun learning and teaching as (Barbara McManus, 2005). It is a commonly observed phenomenon that internet usage may or may not affect the correction and appropriateness level of English language. Moreover, many students and teachers alike start using internet with little or no training which may or may not make them realize its full potential of benefit and a whole set of creative activities. Although with the passage of time as the use increases and internet is explored more and more they will learn new aspects of learning.

A common issue is lack of training of teachers for using these technologies creatively for a large group, small group or pair work (Warsi, 2004). Internet is still not a very popular medium of learning in English language classrooms of Pakistan. Although teaching and learning on internet are never without difficulties especially in a country like Pakistan where electricity breakouts, non-availability of internet, lack of suitable technological equipment are common problems encountered on daily basis. It is also observed that many students and teachers privately and personally at homes have access to internet and awareness of the utility of technology in classrooms. However, they mostly find themselves dissatisfied in the classroom environment where rest of the students and sometimes even teachers are not well trained and well aware of updated methodologies. The real problem occurs when both teachers and students find themselves in the classroom with a curriculum that is not designed for adapting and incorporating technology in the classroom. It has been observed that incorporation of technology in language classrooms makes them more stimulating and less strenuous such as in boring exercises for learning proper accent or pronunciation (Chandrika Mohan, 2012: pp64).

In addition to internet, TV/Movies are another important medium which can benefit English language learners both inside and outside the classroom. The current news and commentaries on various TV channels are an important source for English Language Learning and Teaching. English being the international language with social, political, business and most of all global power is the language for thought and expression as well. Movies too can be a source of learning specially for learning language use in situations similar to daily life. (Abdul Mahmoud Idrees Ibrahim, 2010) Although many teachers and students on their own try to remain updated with current English accent and pronunciation via various news channels displaying news and

documentaries, still most of the Pakistani English language classrooms lack this modern facility to integrate these audio/visual pedagogical tools in the classes. Moreover, the idea of language lab is also getting very popular in the ELT world but actual implementation and affectivity is not substantial enough. Similarly, the trendy use of internet didn't promote the webinars remarkably in English Language Teaching in many countries of the world, and Pakistan is one of them.

One promising and most recent feature is a proper, formal and authenticated radio broadcast, podcast, web services by students and teachers (Mark Warschauer & Carla Meskill, 2000). The involvement in such activities which demand real language skills as in a real life situation can enhance speaking skills both naturally and still professionally. Such activities when done even on a small scale for a short or limited time period can bring long-term changes in perception of speaking and actual speaking skills. Moreover, it is undoubtedly a fun method to learn from and teach which is missing in most of the Pakistani schools, colleges and universities.

Context and Methodology:

The students coming to Pakistani universities for specializing in all kinds of subjects such as Engineering, Computer Sciences, Business Administration and Social Sciences are weak in spoken English. This research is initiated in the context of the observation about the Pakistani students that they are weak in speaking skills of English. Moreover, it is focused to know the availability and impact of technology in ELT classrooms of Pakistan.

A survey was conducted using a closed end questionnaire on fifty university, college, school and language center teachers of Pakistan teaching English at bachelors and masters level or certificate and diploma classes. The survey included fifteen questions focusing on the points like availability and impact of technology on ELT in Pakistan, weak areas in spoken skills of Pakistani students and need of formal training or ELT instructor for learning speaking skills. The major areas in speaking skills such as accent, pronunciation, tenses, sentence structure, vocabulary, confidence and fluency were especially inquired about. The individual responses of the English teachers were recorded and the answers were later on calculated in percentage in three categories of Agree, Neutral or Disagree. The original fifteen questions were grouped while calculating the answers to analyze the responses in a more precise way.

Data and Findings:

According to the results majority of the respondents agreed that there is lack of availability of technology in ELT classrooms of Pakistan. However, it was positively supported by majority of the respondents whether they were only teaching ELT or involved in both teaching and learning that technology has a positive impact on ELT classrooms.

The weakest area in speaking skills of English according to survey was interestingly the tenses and sentence structure used by Pakistani students. The second area in the similar hierarchy the going downwards in percentage was vocabulary. Accent and pronunciation was considered to be on the third number in the weak areas in speaking skills. Lastly, fluency and confidence were considered to be the strongest or less weak area in English speaking skills of Pakistani students.

The last question was about the possibility of improvement in spoken English skills without formal training or ELT instructor which was opposed by the majority. It means that most of the respondents favored the opinion that ELT instructors and formal training is needed for improving spoken English skills.

Sr. no #	Responses	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1-	Availability of Technology in Pakistani ELT Classrooms	17.2 %	15.2 %	67.2 %
2-	Positive impact of Technology on ELT in Pakistani Classrooms	74 %	13 %	13 %
3-	Accent & Pronunciation as the Weakest Speaking skill in Spoken English of Pakistani students	81 %	9 %	10 %
4-	Vocabulary as the Weakest Speaking skill in Spoken English of Pakistani students	88 %	12 %	0 %
5-	Tenses & Sentence Structure as the Weakest Speaking skill in Spoken English of Pakistani students	89 %	8 %	2 %
6-	Fluency & Confidence as the Major Problem area in Spoken English of Pakistani students	70 %	21 %	9 %
7-	Improvement in Spoken English possible without formal training or ELT instructor	36 %	10 %	54 %

Table 1: Survey responses in Percentage

Discussion and Conclusion:

The findings of the survey and observation preceding it both indicate that use of technology needs to be promoted in a country like Pakistan for improving English Language Teaching. The emphasis on weak areas in English speaking skills of Pakistani students and improving them by integrating technology in ELT classrooms specifically is the main concern of this study.

The students can be involved in activities combined with the technology to make learning easy and interesting. In this regard, internet can be very valuable. ELT instructors can initiate group

discussions in the class with the help of internet. The students can take hints from literary material available on internet for activities like group discussions, role plays, word games etc. In situations where teachers give them an extempore task specially for speaking; internet can prove to be a good tool and great friend.

For individual learning and improvement, the teacher can give tasks which involve practicing pronunciation, accent and vocabulary building. In such case, various websites like thefreedictionary.com provides both British and American pronunciation of words. In addition, phonetics chart, word games can be a source of interest and instant learning and help for the students.

In situations where the teacher has to handle a large group of students, the internet with provision of audio aid of speakers and computer can be of great help. The drilling exercises where a common mistake in accent, pronunciation has to be eliminated can be repeated with the help of these audio/visual aids instead of the teacher going through the exhausting procedure. Other skills like, tenses, sentence construction and vocabulary can similarly be enhanced by making the students listen to patterns of dialogues and conversation for various occasions.

Moreover, the most recent fresh medium for classroom learning which is already being used in various ELT classrooms worldwide is podcast. The teacher can easily record interesting conversation, exercises for improving accent, pronunciation, patterns of opening sentences, and live documentaries on this small equipment from Live Radio broadcast, TV Bulletins or internet audio/video files which can be incorporated in the ELT classrooms even when there is no internet access. These podcast recordings can be easily given to students for practice both in and out of the class. The teachers can supplement these podcasts from online ELT podcasting resources like BBC.

Although, on the private level or individually many ELT teachers and students have some know how about these emerging fresh trends in ELT classrooms worldwide; still there is a dire need to incorporate them in Pakistani ELT classrooms.

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