Exploring Web Resources for Teaching of English Language Skills

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ABSTRACT

Well-planned teaching is the synonym of an effective teaching that results in enhancing students' learning. Teaching requires planning for content selection, designing, preparation and its delivery in a productive and efficient way, considering the diverse needs of today's classrooms and its students. Students' learning highly depends upon the ways of teaching. Present day classrooms are occupied by "Digital Natives" (Prensky, 2001). In order to make them learn English, teachers need to understand their specific needs and learning styles for adopting and implementing suitable tools and strategies. Technological advancement has made a vital place in our classrooms and education system to make teaching and learning more innovative and meaningful. Technology provides invaluable resources that can be utilized for English language teaching, no matter where the classes are situated. This review article aims at highlighting the connection between technology and English teaching that fosters creative and constructive learning environment. It also explores and provides details of the technological resources available for teaching various language skills in an innovative way along with its integration in and outside the classroom teaching.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching, English Language Skills, Technology, Web Resources, Integration*

INTRODUCTION

Technology has changed everyone's life tremendously which is witnessed by innovative changes in instructional processes adopted by educational institutions during COVID-19 pandemic around the world. Importance of technology is focused by many educational commissions and policies. The latest National Education Policy 2020 also highlights importance of technology in education to make learning more experiential, holistic, learner-centred, enjoyable and flexible. This policy has several fundamental principles. One of the fundamental principles is the "extensive use of technology in teaching and learning…."

Use of technology for instructional purposes needs proper planning and integration for getting productive and fruitful results. Needless to say that technologically advanced societies are today's reality. Technology has brought changes in societal, moral, educational and aesthetic landscapes. Its various tools are being used across a wide variety of educational subjects and research areas. It is witnessed that teaching and learning have made a shift from traditional to technology supported mode of learning. In the former one, teacher is the source and learners are, simply, receivers of knowledge whereas the later one denotes the creation of an environment where teachers are more like the facilitators and work as guides and learners learn by doing through active participation and construct

knowledge collaboratively. Another noteworthy point about teachers of today is that they are less like trainers or transmitters of information, more like community managers and creators of suitable environment for creative and constructive learning. Similar point is mentioned by Bikowski (2015), "Teachers can move from being one-way transmitters of information into educational facilitators and guides, and students can now become more self-directed and active in their own learning processes."

Language is a means of communication that is a set of rule governed system; used for conveying messages, informing people, sharing thoughts and feelings. Language and technology are interconnected. It was asked by Warschauer (2002), "Is technology a tool for language learning, or is language learning a tool with which people can access technology?" It was further suggested that language and technology are used as tools for individual as well as societal development (Warschauer, 2002). It is a well-known fact that the world of communication has changed dramatically with technological advancements. These technologies have expanded the ways people communicate with each other whether in oral, written or visual forms. As technology is used for communication, it has high potential of becoming a great tool for language teaching and supporting language learning. Technology includes simulations, electronic communication and multi-media production that help in multi-sensory approach to teaching and learning. The prerequisite for technology integration is teachers' knowledge of technology and its application for classroom teaching. Teachers need to learn about the available resources and how to use them to develop pedagogy that is suitable for learners and their meaningful learning. Undoubtedly, internet provides various resources as well as

opportunities for making teaching and learning of language authentic, fun, interesting, engaging and motivating. It increases learners' cooperation in learning tasks (Gillespie, 2006), creates learner centred atmosphere (Dawson, Cavanaugh, & Ritzhaupt, 2008; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2014) and promotes equal participation of learners (Eaton, 2010).

TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Language teaching always revolves around the basic aim of developing language skills that lead to development of communicative competence among learners. English is a global language that is widely known and used for reaching people around the world. Technology empowers teachers with large selection of English language materials and resources. The technological tools' effectiveness depends upon its appropriate usage. According to Stevenson (2020), "It is important to remember these are only tools, how you use them is what makes or breaks the class." So, a teacher has a major role to play in planning and organizing English materials in productive and useful manner. Their role shifts from being transmitters of information to facilitators and guides in teaching-learning process. Language teachers need to master different skills and competencies to create media-rich classroom environment and to design technology-enabled resources to transform classroom practices.

For taking online classes, tools such as Google Classroom (https://classroom.google.com), Flipgrid (https://flipgrid.com) and Zoom (https://zoom.us) can be utilized by teachers. These platforms provide range of activities through text, video and audio mode, discussion forum, reflections, group activities, assignments, grading, etc. These are anytime and anywhere classes. Apart from these, teachers can also use various

online resources for enriching and enhancing English language skills of learners.

TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING LISTENING

Among language skills, listening is counted as a receptive skill which is a process of receiving sounds. Listening does not only mean passive receiving of sounds, but also its processing and meaning-making. It is a progressive ability to understand a particular language. It always includes comprehension that is a cognitive ability. It is considered as an essential and foundation skill. Poor listening skill can lead to failure in effective communication. Teachers can adopt activities for enhancing listening skills of their learners that include use of stories, songs, entertainment films, theatre and videos for making learning of listening fun and engaging. There are many websites that provide a great collection of authentic materials and resources to be applied for teaching and developing listening skill in English such as Ted Talks/Ted Ed, Voice of America, ESL Lab, ESL Lounge, Many Things, American English, Learning English Kids and You Tube.

Ted Talks and Ted Ed (https://ted.com/talks & https://ed.ted.com) provide a rich variety of videos in English on various topics with subtitles that can be proved beneficial for teaching listening. Teachers can arrange series of pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities related to the videos on the topics of their choice and learners' standard. **Learning English** (https://learningenglish.voanews.com/) section of **Voice of America (VOA)** is a "multimedia source of news and information for millions of English learners world (Voice of America, n.d.). It contains news stories in video format with audio and subtitles. It gives opportunity for bringing current and interesting

materials in English classes of different levels; beginning, intermediate and advance, covering variety of interesting topics. **ESL Lab** (https://www.esl-lab.com) provides free listening materials and activities for ESL and EFL learners. It provides listening comprehension quizzes for different levels of classes; easy, intermediate and difficult.

ESL Lounge (https://www.esl-lounge.com) is a site that provides English exercises of grammar, vocabulary, listening and reading. It is helpful for teachers as well as learners. ESL lesson plans, materials, pronunciation guide, board games, quizzes, blogs, ESL books, song lyrics, etc. are available for incorporating in classroom teaching. **Many Things** (http://www.manythings.org) is a website that has resources for all English skills. Teachers can explore sections devoted to particular skill. In listening section, it provides audio files with different English accents. It has links such as listen and repeat videos, listen and read along, learn songs, jokes with audio, etc. that are helpful in enriching listening skill.

American English (https://americanenglish.state.gov) website is very rich for providing English teaching resources across American culture and societies. It provides audio books also for practicing listening skill. **Learning English Kids** (https://learningenglishkids.britishcouncil.org) provides resources in the areas like listen and watch that consists of songs, short stories and poems in attractive visual form. **You Tube** (www.youtube.com) is not only for entertainment, but also a great tool in the field of education. Films, songs, and other materials can be utilized for practicing listening in authentic English. Animation tools can be used for adding life to the lessons. Reading passages can be converted into an animated video through free tools such as Toonstastic (https://toontastic.withgoogle.

com). Podcasts can also be used to develop listening skill that give chance to listen to English from around the world. BBC Podcasts are free to download (https://bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/). Videos from SWAYAM PRAHA (https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/) and ePathshala (https://www.epathshala.nic.in) can also be utilized for practising English listening skill in the Indian context.

Other resources include Lyrics training, Listen Notes, Accent Rosie (Face Book Messenger), Teach Vid, Speak-Pipe and many more. These materials are of great help to those students and teachers around the world who don't have an environment where English is used as a first language. They provide opportunities to listen to authentic English. Good listening in English is result of mastering its sound system. These authentic sound systems are accessible on the aforementioned online platforms. Technology provides access to many different ways for students to listen and learn. They need to be taught to use clues while listening to the materials and to use the capabilities of technology to help them with their listening. They should be encouraged to use resources such as subtitles, transcripts, repetitions, reference materials, images, etc. to get listening support. Here, strategy-based approach should be adopted for teaching listening. Teachers need to explore the available resources and design lessons according to their learners and learning contexts. It is advisable to make them contextual for better comprehension. These resources make listening learner-centred, easy and enjoyable.

TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING SPEAKING

Learning English means learning to understand and speak it. Speaking skill is a base for effective communication. "Students who can speak English well may have a greater chance of further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion" (Baker & Westrup, 2003). A good English speaker produces correct sounds, stress, tone patterns and intonation, varies speed according to situation and audience, makes good use of body language or non-verbal supports, remains confident and motivated and uses a good stock of vocabulary to express himself/herself. Speaking activities should provide practices for real communication such as talking about their lives, news, ideas and discussing issues (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

Listening and speaking skills work as foundation for second language learning. But, these are highly neglected skills in education system. Students don't get proper exposure and opportunities to learn how to speak and to use correct English. Fortunately, technology gives teachers and students new opportunities for learning oral communication, pronunciation and vocabulary in an interesting and encouraging environment. The websites and resources for teaching and learning speaking are Voice of America, Online Dictionaries, Google Translate, Skype, Google Hangouts, YouGlish, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp.

YouGlish (https://youglish.com) is a website that allows students to type any word or phrase for getting its accurate and authentic pronunciation along with videos where speakers are using the same word or phrase in real life. It gives "fast, unbiased answers about how English are spoken by real people and in context" (YouGlish, n.d.). **Skype** (https://www.skype.com) is a communication tool for free calls and chat options that provide the opportunity to connect with people across the globe. The world is more connected because of the internet and its resources. Skype has video, audio and text features that can be utilized for collaborative tasks

to learn speaking skill. Its video calling feature gives a kind of face-to-face interaction. Along with Skype, Google Hangouts (https://hangouts.google.com) also provides free messaging, video and voice calls with a person or group for collaborative learning.

In People in America (https://www.voanews.com) and Pronunciation Guide (https://pronounce.voanews.com) sections of **Voice of America,** students can get help in checking pronunciation of difficult names and places with expressions in English. Adding to it, different **online and offline dictionaries** are also available to learn pronunciation, stress and tone. These include Merriam Webster (https://www.merriam-webster.com), Oxford (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionary.com), Cambridge (https://dictionary.cambridge.org), and Macmillan (https://www.macmillandictionary.com). For pronunciation of words and phrases, Google Translate can also be utilized. These resources also enhance and improve vocabulary of learners. English teachers need to explore new and innovative ways to use these websites and resources in accordance to their needs and contexts. Along with these online resources, several techniques can be implemented such as reproductive technique, question-answer, role play, oral presentation, etc. in order to assess students' achieved level of speaking skills and abilities.

TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING READING

Reading is a complex cognitive skill of making meaning out of the text being read. It is not simple decoding of the symbols written in a particular language, but it's about comprehension of the text. In true sense, reading means reading accompanied by understanding. Through the advent of technology, English texts are available for reading and for further discussion. There are several websites that provide authentic materials in English in simplified way for reading. For example, American English website has a section called "Resources" that provides access to a large number of resources for teachers and are accessible to everyone around the world. Fan Fiction (https://www.fanfiction.net) is another website that can be utilized for creation of stories. It helps in making reading-writing connection.

Another source is Voice of America (https://www.voanews.com) that provides stories related to current events. In addition, Gutenburg Project (https://www.gutenburg.org) website has a large number of e-books available for reading. The major challenge for teacher is to select a text that is appropriate for the level of their learners. Therefore, teachers need to design activities by using appropriate materials after analysing students' needs, interest levels and understanding levels of their learners. Students need to be encouraged to read through different strategies such as making predictions, using background knowledge, book walks, visualization, partner reading, question-answer, summarization and discussion.

TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING WRITING

Writing is a means of organizing thoughts and giving it precision. In our education system, writing skill has been given the highest position as all examinations and promotions are based on writing of students. Writing is a productive skill that denotes a process of producing meaningful symbols in a particular language. It allows learners to apply and consolidate the knowledge they have gained in class through textbooks. It helps in translating the passive knowledge of language structures to active use on paper or on digital platform. It focuses on vocabulary,

originality, accuracy and coherence. The most difficult part of writing English is correct usage of grammar or accuracy. Technology provides access to many different resources for students to write correctly and clearly in English,

For this purpose, **Grammarly** (https://www.grammarly.com) can be used. It analyses students' writing from all possible aspects of grammar and suggests correction for their writing. To some extent, it is free, but it requires payment for premium subscription with some advance additional features. **Word processing software** can also be utilized for teaching writing. It provides scope for revision and editing while writing on screen. It gives grammatical clues to the writer. It focuses on writing as a process rather than as a product. Collaborative writing web based software includes Google docs through which one can create and edit text documents in the browsers. It saves all changes automatically and gives opportunities for collaborative writing tasks. At the same time, many collaborators can be added and asked for preparing a write up by integrating their ideas together. "Web-based word processing tools can be utilized, as they offer synchronous or asynchronous writing/editing, chatting, comment features, and revision history features for referring to or reverting to past versions of the document" (Bikowski, 2015).

Journal writing websites and apps can also be used for letting students record their own experiences on daily basis and practise writing in English digitally. There are online journal writing websites such as Penzu (https://penzu.com) which is a private and customizable online reflective journal and Padlet (https://padlet.com) helps in making boards, documents and web pages. Its premium paid package for school is more secure and provides user management, access control, student's portfolio and school wide activity monitoring. Teachers need to plan suitable but dynamic writing activities that promote engagement and active participation of learners.

The compiled web resources for enriching language skills are given in the following figure:

Figure 1 *Web Resources for Teaching English*
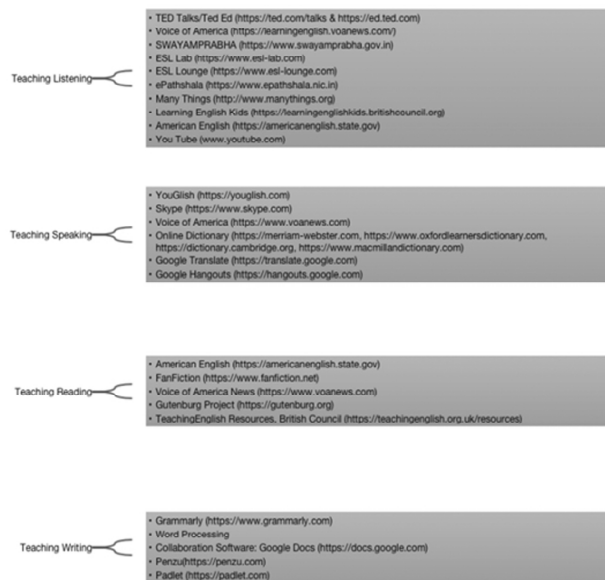
INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

In a country like India where English is a second language, technology should be utilized to its utmost level for getting resources from around the world and adapting them according to learners' needs and contexts. Bikowski (2015) said, "As technologies evolve, our communication styles, information needs and learning patterns are changing as well." Technology is innovative and creative on one hand, but challenging on the other, as it asks for changing teaching and learning in correspondence to the changing demands and requirements of the changing environment. Teachers need to concentrate their knowledge, skills and energies to select, design, adapt, construct and implement new set of teaching materials that are accessible through advent of technology. There are several steps that should be followed by teachers while using and integrating technology in English classroom. These are given in the following figure:

Figure 2 *Steps for Integration of Technology in English Teaching*
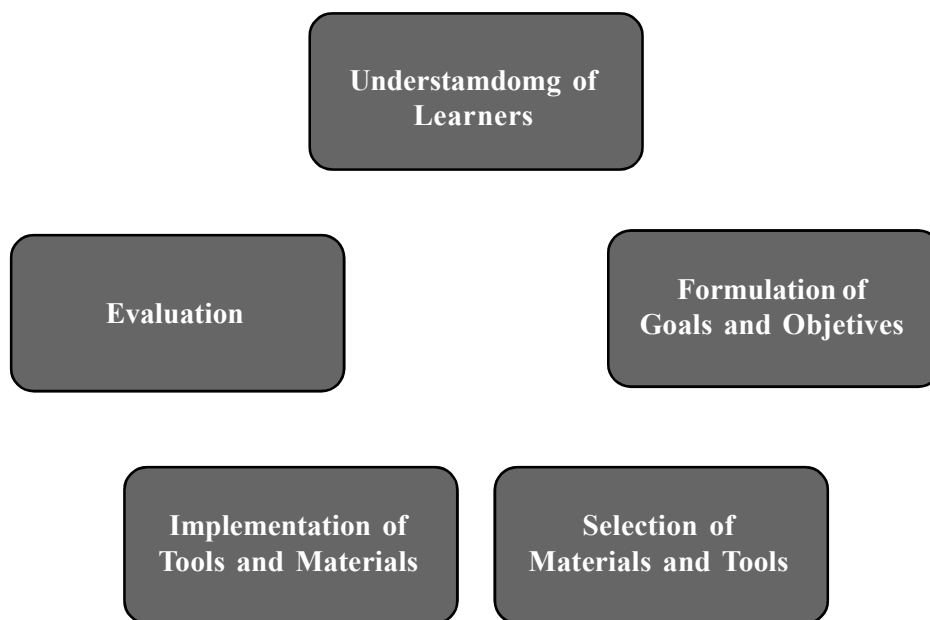
As shown in figure 2, teachers should first understand learners and their individual differences. Focus should be given on learners' needs, learning styles, intelligence, personality and interests. For successful integration of technology in English classroom, "consider your students' personal interests and keep your authentic materials engaging, short and appropriate to their proficiency levels" (Thomas, 2014). Pedagogical shifts must be brought to reach every learner through contextualization of materials and methodologies. Kumaravadivelu (2003) supports for a pedagogy that is "responsive to and responsible for local individual, institutional, social and cultural contexts in which learning and teaching take place." A mismatch between learners' needs and selected materials may lead to non-attainment of teaching objectives.

Secondly, goals and objectives must be formulated according to the learners. In the words of Graves

(2000), "goals state the broader aims of what the teaching unit is meant to address, while the objectives break down the goals into statements that are teachable, learnable and specifically measurable" (As cited in Butler, Heslup & Kurth, 2015). Goals and objectives give direction for further steps in teaching. After this, selection of material should be based on the characteristics of learners along with being in line with the pre-set objectives. The content should provide relevant and meaningful exposure to the target language and connect learners with the world outside the classroom. It should be according to the understanding level of learners. This step should be followed by implementation of tools and materials in classroom teaching. Its effectiveness can be evaluated in the next step where teachers need to evaluate and reflect on the achievement of formulated goals and objectives.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be stated that technology makes English lessons joyful, dynamic and engaging for learners and promotes collaborative and creative environment. Its effective usage brings diversity in classroom teaching and makes learners more interactive and participative. It makes learners flexible, autonomous and self-directed. They develop English language skills and become more confident in using it in real life situations. While using technological resources, teachers need to recognize the challenges and to make balance and to cultivate collaboration among students. Along with the usage of these technologies, learners must be taught about issues concerning privacy, security and academic honesty. Through it, students will become life-long learners in this digital age.

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