Digitalizing the World of English Language Teaching: Dare for Change

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Abstract

English occupies a prominent place among languages that are used in the teaching-learning activities in the world. In a multilingual world, English acts as a link language that would enable people to connect and work together. During the time of pandemic, that has considerably thwarted the conventional mode of education, the language educators are trying to invent creative alternatives to the teaching and learning methods in the field of ELT. The new experiments on the teaching-learning has considerably shifted to the online mode, especially to the conference platforms, in the light of the recent lock down that has been imposed in many countries. This paper attempts to bring out how interactive white boards such as a Jam board and a Zite board can be effectively integrated in to the online teaching platform along with a few tried and tested teaching methods to improve English language skills in a fun filled manner.

Key words- ELT, Jam board, Zite board, online teaching, Activity based ELT

I. Introduction

There are number of studies vis-à-vis the importance of language in the teaching-learning activities. Man/woman acquire language at an early age as his/her mother-tongue and would further get introduced to other languages as part of his/her education and profession. Apart from the mother-tongue, learning a new language would be an extremely rewarding experience, there by opening many innuendos of experiences. English is no doubt the most important international language among thousands of other languages that exist in the world. It's widely used by people of different culture, race, and language. In today's competitive world, people are expected to think in high level of cognition. All information needs to be synthesized, analyzed, evaluated and communicated, and these are expected to be done in a language that is not their first language but English.

With the increase in demand for English language, people of different nationalities, mother tongue and culture are trying to grasp the language. Being able to communicate clearly and effectively in English language has become the key as language competence enables cultural and international engagements and understanding. Language educators all around the world are trying to invent creative and interesting methodologies and learning strategies which will enable the students to acquire English language fluency with ease.

The 21st Century teachers, otherwise labelled the facilitators of knowledge have tried and tested many innovative teaching methodologies. In this era where most of the people are tech-savvy, integrating technology into ELT has been in vogue since some time. It has brought in fun and creativity to language teaching and

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learning experience. But several factors used to restrict the educators from utilizing the myriad of technology induced methods. However, the new world of pandemic has mobilized the exploration of various technologies into ELT, which has become a necessity rather than an option.

In today's scenario to think out of the box and to delve into new arenas of teaching has become extremely imperative to satiate the need of the time. Exploring and experimenting different tools available can spice up language classes for good. The attempt of this paper is to introduce two platforms that would enable the teachers to conduct online classes effectively along with a few tried and tested teaching methods.

The first tool is the Jam board. It is a free interactive white board tool provided by Google which gives multiple boards on the same screen. Before using any tool, it's important to make sure that all the students have access to it. One can draw, erase, add sticky notes and add images on the board. The background of the board can be changed into different colors or graph. Boards created will be saved to the Google drive. Other teachers or students can be collaborated by sharing the link or inviting them personally. The board can also be exported as an image or PDF. Jam board is an ideal tool which enables the teacher to teach as if in a normal classroom with a board.

Jam board can be assessed by typing in jamboard.google.com. A screen would appear with a + orange icon towards the bottom right. This icon is to create a new board. A new screen would appear upon clicking it. A number of icons could be seen on upper left horizontally and towards left side vertically. Each of the icon is used to zoom, change the background of the screen, various types of pens to write, sticky notes, add images and to highlight. On the right-side upper corner an icon to share, collaborate with others, covert to PDF could be seen.

Zite board is another virtual interactive whiteboard which can be used which is similar to the Jam board. One has to sign up. It has all features as the Jam board like writing, erasing, sticky notes with an extra feature of adding a PDF. This is helpful in giving exercises to the students. The work can be collaborated with others as Jam board and can be exported in the same way.

Often teachers find it difficult to get the attention of the students during an online class. Though there could be several reasons for this, the most important reason could be that the classes might not be interesting for the students. One of the approaches that are gaining attention is Game based learning (GBL). Though this method is popular in a traditional classroom, it can be effectively used in an online classroom as well.

Game based learning is built upon a constructivist type of learning. Constructivism posits the need to provide students with the necessary tools so that can build their own procedures in order to solve a problem. This means participatory process by students, who interact with their environment to solve the situation that is being set out to them. Safe practice, experiential learning and interaction are the pillars upon which the theory of gam-based learning stands for. The theory of game-based learning allows students to acquire knowledge through practice and social interaction both with their environment and their peers. (Theory of game-based learning)

No matter the age the learner belongs, or which culture he/she belongs, everybody enjoys and remembers something that is been taught in a fun way. A few of the games that can be used in an online teaching environment are stated below.

Name Place Animal Thing and Celebrity Biographies are two activities that can be effectively used to teach certain grammatical structures. Name Place Animal Thing can be played one on one with a student or a group of students. In this activity students are asked to take a piece of paper and asked to draw four columns, naming each column as name, place, animal and thing. The learner would be given the instruction for the game.When the teacher says start, the learner would start saying the alphabets in mind and when the teacher says stop the learner would stop on an alphabet, he/she was saying and would say the alphabet aloud. Everyone playing the game would write the name of a person, place, animal or thing that starts with that alphabet. A few rounds will go on. By the end of this activity the learner would have unknowingly learned the definition of a noun.

Celebrity Biography is an activity that can effectively be used to teach tenses especially different forms of past tense and can be used both in an online class as well as a regular classroom. Learners of every category will have inclination towards celebrities like Indians love movies both regional as well as national so also cricket; learners of UK love movies, music and sports; Arab learners love football, music and movies. So, bringing their pictures and their biographies to the learning platform is a great idea to get learners' attention.To do the activity, the teacher needs to bring in a biography of a celebrity and have the students to identify the different forms of past tense. For example, 'She was born' 'She had played for many international tournaments' and so on. The students need to identify different verb forms used and explain the difference between them.This exercise helps students to identify how grammar affects the meaning of sentences.

There are several listening and speaking activities as well that will help the learners to improve their respective skills. Often in a listening class, a record would accompany a text and it is played in class and that would be followed by few questions which the learners need to answer. This usually turns out to be boring and repetitive after a while if the teacher just plays on the record and students need to listen intently and answer questions. But if done with a bit of variety the listening class can be spiced up.

No matter the kind of activity done in a language class, it's very important that it's done in a fun filled manner. Try to bring in a variety of activities or else the entire process would become monotonous. The use of audiovisuals has always been very effective. Video clips and missing lyrics are interesting activities to improve listening and speaking skills.Several activities can be done through clips. One is to play only the sound without showing the video or video can be shown without the audio. Later on, the learners will have to predict the content of the items.Missing lyrics of a song is yet another interesting game for the learners. To do this activity the learners should be given a paper with the lyrics of a song with some lyrics missing.Then the track should be played. The teacher can repeat the track two or three times.The same game can be played with poems with missing words in the line. You get several videos online where people are reciting the poem.

Another tried and tested effective learning methods used in professional English language classes such as IELTS is Just a Minute.Learners were able to improve their fluency using this technique. This method can even be practiced at home since it does not require any partner and it involves three stages. In the first stage, the learner can choose any interesting topic of their choice. Even if it's a daily routine like 'my hobby'. Next, he/she needs to talk on the topic for a full whole minute continuously without a break. So set the timer for a minute. It doesn't matter if what's been said doesn't make any sense; the idea is that the words should flow out. There are certain rules though. First of all, learners are not allowed to repeat ideas. Since it's a fluency-based practice,

ideas should be different. Secondly, learners are not allowed to do any kind of writing in stage 1. Concentrate only on the speaking.The second stage is to build in fluency. Now in this stage the learner can use a pen and paper. The learner should go back to the speech he/she delivered and should collect at least three main ideas from the speech.Once the ideas are collected, these should be noted down and repeat the exercise.So set the timer for a minute and speak on the same topic once again using the notes.This time the learner will notice that his/her fluency has improved a little bit, since they are aware about the topic and have some notes. The learner just needs to expand on the ideas.So, in stage three for the final time the learner needs to speak again. This is the final speech.Here the learners can add on a little bit on their notes.Set the timer again for a minute and speak again. The learner themselves can see the difference after doing the task. This task is often asked to do at home too. Once the learner start practicing speech even in the comfort of their privacy, speaking skills greatly improves.

In the present scenario when the world is likely to go in to a period of deglobalization, education is also likely to get affected. So, it has become extremely imperative to think out of the box in order to meet with the demands of present-day teaching and learning. Teachers around the world are doing their best to invent innovative teaching methodologies by making the better use of technology and to make teaching and learning a more meaningful experience.

Work Cited

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