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Systematic Review of History of ELT: Influential Changes

Khadijeh Qaffari

Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL,
Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

***Corresponding Author:**
email

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ABSTRACT

Since English Language Teaching (ELT) is a highly dynamic domain, it has undergone significant changes over the years in response to evolving educational needs and research findings. These changes have manifested in different areas such as teachers' and learners' roles, curriculum development, 21st-century skills integration, the impact of global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca, teaching methods, learning processes, learning assessment, and preparing language teachers. Considering these factors result in innovations and improving teaching quality. So, the focus of this paper is on investigating affected areas in details and provide insights for teachers to help more professional teaching.

Keywords: ELT, roles, assessment, teaching methods, curriculum development

Introduction

Since English Language Teaching (ELT) is a highly dynamic domain, it has undergone significant changes over the years in response to evolving educational needs and research findings. These changes have manifested in different areas such as teachers' and learners' roles, curriculum development, 21st-century skills integration, the impact of global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca, teaching methods, learning processes, learning assessment, and preparing language teachers. The impact of technology and globalization on teaching practices [1], the evolution of methodological orthodoxies and communicative approaches [2,3], the dichotomy between native and non-native English-speaking teachers in Asia [4], and the trending research topics in ELT such as global Englishers and technological disruptions are important results of changes.

In discussing change in education Kuhn's notion of paradigm shift is often referred to Jacobs and Farrell 2001 [5]. According to Kuhn new paradigms in science emerge rapidly as revolutions in thinking shatter previous ways of thinking. Reviewing changes in language teaching in the last 30 years, while some changes perhaps have the status of paradigm shifts (e.g. the spread of Communicative Language Teaching and Process Writing) most of the changes documented above have come about more gradually and at different times. In some contexts, some of the changes may not even have started.

Probably the main motivation for change comes from dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs. Despite the resources expended on second and foreign language teaching worldwide in almost every country results normally do not match expectations, hence the constant pressure to adopt new curriculum, teaching methods, materials, and forms of assessment. Government policy often is the starting point for change when requirements are announced for a new curriculum or syllabus or for some other change in goals or the delivery of language instruction. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on investigating affected areas in details and provide insights for teachers to help more professional teaching:

Teachers' and learners' roles

Teachers

The teaching profession has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, driven by several key factors:

- Technological advancements have paved the way for technology integration in classrooms, allowing teachers

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to engage students through interactive digital tools and personalized learning experiences.

- Changes in educational philosophies have led to a greater emphasis on data-driven insights, enabling educators to tailor their instruction to individual student needs, fostering educational equity and inclusivity.
- The adoption of rigorous educational standards and a focus on professional development have elevated the quality of teaching.
- A shift towards student-centered learning approaches empowers learners to take an active role in their education, promoting engagement and ownership of their learning journey.
- As society becomes more diverse and interconnected, teachers are tasked with fostering global perspectives and cultural competencies in their students, preparing them for a dynamic and multicultural world.

In essence, the teaching profession today is characterized by adaptability, innovation, and a commitment to equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world. Therefore, the following roles can be defined [6]:

- The Controller: The teacher is in complete charge of the class, what students do, what they say and how they say it. The teacher assumes this role when a new language is being introduced and accurate reproduction and drilling techniques are needed.

In this classroom, the teacher is mostly the center of focus, the teacher may have the gift of instruction, and can inspire through their own knowledge and expertise, but, does this role really allow for enough student talk time? Is it really enjoyable for the learners? There is also a perception that this role could have a lack of variety in its activities.

- The Prompter: The teacher encourages students to participate and makes suggestions about how students may proceed in an activity. The teacher should be helping students only when necessary.

When learners are literally 'lost for words', the prompter can encourage by discreetly nudging students. Students can sometimes lose the thread or become unsure how to proceed; the prompter in this regard can prompt but always in a supportive way.

- The Resource: The teacher is a kind of walking resource center ready to offer help if needed, or provide learners with whatever language they lack when performing communicative activities. The teacher must make her/himself available so that learners can consult her/him when (and only when) it is absolutely necessary.

As a resource the teacher can guide learners to use available resources such as the internet, for themselves, it certainly isn't necessary to spoon-feed learners, as this might have the downside of making learners reliant on the teacher.

- The Assessor: The teacher assumes this role to see how well students are performing or how well they performed. Feedback and correction are organized and carried out.

There are a variety of ways we can grade learners; the role of an assessor gives teachers an opportunity to correct learners. However, if it is not communicated with sensitivity and support it could prove counter-productive to a student's self-esteem and confidence in learning the target language.

- The Organizer: Perhaps the most difficult and important role the teacher has to play. The success of many activities depends on good organization and on the students knowing exactly what they are to do next. Giving instructions is vital in this role as well as setting up activities.

The organizer can also serve as a demonstrator, this role also allows a teacher to get involved and engaged with learners. The teacher also serves to open and neatly close activities and also give content feedback.

- The Participant: This role improves the atmosphere in the class when the teacher takes part in an activity. However, the teacher takes a risk of dominating the activity when performing it.

Here the teacher can enliven a class; if a teacher is able to stand back and not become the center of attention, it can be a great way to interact with learners without being too overpowering.

- The Tutor: The teacher acts as a coach when students are involved in project work or self-study. The teacher provides advice and guidance and helps students clarify ideas and limit tasks.

Learners

In the last thirty years learners have come to assume a much more significant role in the language learning process from their contribution in the early 1970s. In the 1970s we tended to underestimate the contribution of the learner or to view it as a somewhat negative one. We tended to assume that learners were very much alike in their reasons for wanting to learn English as well as the ways in which they learn a language. It was assumed that good language teaching meant controlling the learner and that a good teaching method would lead the reluctant learner through the learning process. But then a rethinking of the learner's contribution began in earnest.

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Curriculum Development

Curriculum may be perceived presently as a foundation of the broader area known as education. The history of curriculum development has been characterized and a series of crises with the pendulum shifting between traditionalists' call for getting back to the basics and progressives' focus on the learner.1 While commissioning curriculum development (CD), definition of curriculum and development have their own strategic accountabilities. It may be reasonable to explore various perspectives of definition of curriculum. It is consequential before the execution of the task of development of curriculum for the curriculum developer to assess the concerned needs, define and refine the concept of education.

Teaching Methods

For as long as humans have travelled to other lands, they have studied other languages. Approaches to language teaching have evolved considerably over the centuries thanks to developments in our understanding of how people acquire language.

As well as scientific approaches, language pedagogy has also seen its fair share of fads and fashionable, experimental methods over the years. From the reliance on dreary sentence translation to the use of Baroque music to create an optimal learning environment, language learning has been a fertile field for innovation.

While language pedagogy has seen dozens of distinct methods emerge, they have followed several broad trends. From the 1600s to the 1900s, language learning was seen primarily as a scholarly pursuit, and therefore was only really for the very wealthy or the highly educated. The focus was on learning grammar, and not on being able to actually speak the language.

In the 20th Century, more humanistic approaches to learning were starting to emerge. The emphasis was shifting towards engaging the learner as a whole, rather than just their mind. This holistic, learner-centred style replaced the more authoritarian approaches of the past.

In the 1970s and 1980s, language teaching started moving towards our modern communicative methods. Academics started observing how children learn their first language and applying their findings to second language acquisition.

Learning Processes

In the early seventies both British and North American ideas about language learning were rather similar, though they developed from different traditions. The theory of behaviorism dominated both psychology and education. According to this theory the processes of imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation were central to all learning, including language learning. Chomsky rejected this theory as inapplicable to language learning and emphasized the cognitive nature of language learning and the fact that children appear to be born with abstract knowledge about the nature of language, i.e. knowledge of universal grammar. Exposure to language was sufficient to trigger the acquisition processes and initiate the processes of hypothesis formation that were evident in studies of language acquisition.

earning Assessment

In the 70s testing was something relatively new to applied linguistics. Techniques for testing grammar and the four skills were being developed and criteria for the construction of good test items. We can characterize the goals of testing in this era as measuring "competence" or underlying ability. "Assessment tended to take the form of proficiency testing, based on general ability constructs, which was largely unconnected to the curriculum" [7]. The basis for teaching and testing was generally one of the four skills and testing was based on the content that was covered or taught. The test developer or teacher in preparing tests of the different skill areas was required to sample from among the content that had been covered in the course. The statistics of sampling thus became a very important component in traditional quality test design. Tests were norm-referenced, that is they measured the performance of learners in comparison with other test takers whose scores were given as the norm. The information obtained from tests was converted into marks, which were accumulated during the learning of a subject, and at the end of a course the student and the teacher were expected to be able to draw some inferences about the learner's ability from the marks obtained: Grammar, C +; Listening, B; Reading B -; Writing, A, and so on.

Preparing Language teachers

Between the 1970s and the present period a sub-field of language teaching has emerged now known as second language teacher education (Roberts, 1998). This refers to the study of the theory and practice of teacher development for language teachers. In the last thirty years there has also developed a substantial industry devoted to providing language teachers with professional training and qualifications.

The knowledge base of language teaching has also expanded substantially although there are still significant differences of opinion concerning what the essential knowledge base of language teaching consists of.

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Conclusion

As English Language Teaching (ELT) continues to adapt and transform in response to various influences, understanding the historical context of these changes is essential for educators and researchers alike. This systematic review delves into the influential changes that have shaped the landscape of ELT throughout its history. From traditional methods to contemporary approaches, each shift in practice or theory has left an indelible mark on how English is taught and learned around the world. By examining these historical transformations, we can gain valuable insights into the evolution of ELT and its implications for current and future practices in language education.

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