Edutainment In Teaching Efl At The Higher Educational Establishment Of Russia

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to create a theoretical framework of modern educational technology edutainment and its tool TED-talks to use in the EFL classroom at the higher educational establishment in Russia. The applied methodology was based on the literature review, by analyzing the studies of various foreign and Russian researchers, scholars, and their contribution to the field of edutainment. It allowed us to analyze, describe the relevant aspects of the concepts, and highlight the main features which are essential while teaching EFL in the classroom using this educational technology. TED-talks were reviewed in the framework of edutainment; thus, a set of exercises was designed as an example of the implementation of TED-talks in EFL class to develop listening skills. The provided questionnaire with the students of second and fourth year who are bachelors in the teaching languages of Kazan Federal University indicated the importance and relevance of adding TED-talks to the classroom.

Key words: EFL teaching, educational technology, edutainment, TED-talks, listening skills.

Introduction

According to the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education 3 ++ in Russia, the goal of EFL teaching is to develop the foreign language communicative competence which includes the development of receptive (listening, reading) and productive (speaking, reading) skills. The foreign language communicative competence can be deciphered as the ability and willingness to communicate in a foreign language with native speakers, to perceive and understand interlocutors, express freely, coherently, and adequately their thoughts [1]; [2].

The students are interested in gaining knowledge in an interactive, fun, entertaining, challenging way, especially while learning the language. Drill exercises from the books as a classroom activity still have some weight and significance in the curriculum but, the usage of the new tools is required to get the most out of language learning during the EFL class. Having studied and analyzed a significant amount of literature, the authors suggest that

educational technology can be a great addition to the EFL classroom. The educational technology that is the concern of this study is ''Edutainment'', furtherly we will analyze the concept, the history, Russian and foreign researchers' views, and its implementation in modern educational practice to develop a theoretical framework of teaching EFL, the edutainment tool that is viewed in the study is TED-talks.

Methods

Different researchers and scholars take a different approach to identify what edutainment is as a phenomenon which was proved by the theoretical review of their works. Foreign researches are more inclined to consider edutainment as an implementation of different tools in order to make the learning fun, but we have to note that most of them pay attention to balance between education and entertainment elements. [3]; [4]; [5]. While, most of Russian researchers substitute edutainment to use of games in the learning environments, and as a cognitive and entertaining learning, also they point out that it is mixing traditional educational tools with entertainment elements [6], [7].

As we could see from researchers' views, there are two main streams of edutainment research [8]:

1) The use of entertainment elements in the educational field.
2) The introduction of educational elements into the entertainment process.

In the framework of learning and teaching EFL, we consider this technology as "the use of elements of entertainment in the educational field". And its main ideas are connected to [9]:

1) Usage of teaching tools that are aimed at overcoming the barrier between the teacher and the student.
2) A holistic approach – learning proceeds more successfully if the student can see the benefits of gaining knowledge.
3) Facilitating the creation of a comfortable atmosphere for studying.
4) Increasing learners' motivation.
5) Taking into account students' interests while preparing a lesson material.
6) Achievement of learning outcomes according to the standard.

In this research, we define edutainment as a balanced mix of educational and entertainment elements, which can be successfully implemented into EFL learning by giving a possibility to create a comfortable space for teaching and learning English and integrating interactivity to the classes. One of the advantages of this technology is that it offers a huge arsenal of tools: didactic, methodological, technical, etc., while teaching English at a university to improve the language abilities of students, as well as maintain motivation to master their English language level.

One of the tools of edutainment is TED-talks, which are video lectures given by the leading scientists, artists, and famous personalities, dedicated to current topics and contemporary problems, and burning issues of society. They are presented in the format of video lectures which are within 4-20 minutes that are posted online, creating a space for absorbing the knowledge and emotional influence on the listeners. According to researchers, the content presented fulfills the mission of spreading valuable and unique ideas, as the TED slogan: ideas worth spreading [10]. At the moment, there are more than 3800 TED-talks, which are available on their website (https://www.ted.com/).

Speakers' task is to express their point of view in the field of knowledge in which they are an expert. This project has been active since 1984; it became relevant for language learners after 2009 when the materials were freely available online [11]. This kind of material can increase the motivation of students, as well as make them study new topics, inspire life-long learning, provide personal growth and make students want to gain knowledge [12]; [13].

Researchers note that TED-talks is a teaching tool that helps to make the classes much more interesting and fun, which is one of the main ideas of edutainment. Like any other teaching tool, the implementation of TED-talks requires certain criteria [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]:

Figure 1 – Criteria for TED-talks

Criterion	Description
Taking into account the level of English proficiency of the target audience	It is important when choosing TED-talks, the used lexical and grammatical materials should match the language level of students
Educational potential	The selected content should successfully influence the development of communicative and professional competencies and contribute to broadening the horizons of students
Selection of material	Video lecture is an addition to the material studied during the class.
Taking into account the duration of the video lecture, which is also identified by the level of the target audience's language	TED-talks offer different time variations: 0-6 minutes, 6-12 minutes, and 18 minutes or more. Researchers note that the duration of TED-talks fits perfectly in the concept of the duration of the students' attention concentration
The relevance of the selected video lecture	The information presented in the TED-talk should not distort the existing facts in the modern world; give outdated information that can confuse students
The number of views	Some researchers note that the number of views reflects the quality of the material presented by the speaker and this should be taken into account when selecting material for the lesson

Methodologists believe that TED-talks can be implemented during their stages, that is, pre-stage (getting into the topic that will be covered during the class, with vocabulary), then while-watching (during which it is proposed to do the tasks proposed by the teacher based on the content of the video, and finally, post-watching (discussing the content of the video) [18].

Results And Discussion

The questionnaire was conducted with the students to explore 2 aspects: what are they needs during their EFL classes and what language skills are most important for them to develop at the moment. The conducted questionnaire aimed to explore the students' needs at EFL classes and to prove the relevance of this study. It was given to the students of the second year and the fourth year who are bachelors in the teaching languages of Kazan Federal University and their answers were as followed:

Figure 2 – Statements of students of 2nd year

S1	I'd like to see more speaking in the classes, drilling exercises from the books is kind of boring and makes you tired. Perhaps to watch videos, extracts from tv shows.
S2	New glossary on different topics. Speaking! Different tasks (listening, grammar, writing). Reading texts with rich glossary. To use all knowledge on studying.
S3	I would like to learn more vocabulary and use it in speaking. Test or games like Kahoot! for learning them. I would like to tell my thoughts and to be confident, that people around will understand me.
S4	More speaking. Watching videos.
S5	I'd like to enlarge my vocabulary range, learn new words. Also, I really want to master listening and speaking skills. I think it would be interesting to watch a short-movie. And to practice Grammar.
S6	We need to speak more. To learn new words. To practice our listening skills. Maybe watching films in English and more.
S7	Grammar. Speaking, speaking, speaking. To learn new words, to learn English in an interesting way. Anything with watching films in English.
S8	I'd like to have more interesting topics to talk about and to learn the vocabulary. Classes in a game format, discussions in groups.

Figure 3 – Statements of students of 4th year

S1	I think we need more practice in listening, speaking, writing some texts, doing some tasks etc. in our classes.
S2	Watching short videos and discussing them or watching at home and discussing during class. Also working in groups and coming up with something on main theme of the class. Discussing some life questions, listening to different opinion on it.
S3	Watching films or cartoons in English, then discuss it. More group tasks because it's more interesting.
S4	Watch interesting films/video. Speaking about travelling, teaching, school, people. Reading books (interesting). Grammar. Discuss different topics (home, money and etc.). Learn new words.
S5	I'd like to try to speak more and create some stories, discuss about worldwide problems, exercises to improve English skills (listening, speaking).
S6	To watch movies in English and then discuss. To listen to music and enlarge vocabulary. To speak about different topics.
S7	Practice English with some videos. After watching video discuss it and some difficult words. Sometimes do the grammar test.

A lot of students mention that they need more speaking-related tasks and activities, also most of them implied that we need to focus on the development of listening skills. Some students mention the development of reading and writing. It is essential for them to enlarge their vocabulary range and to train their grammar.

So, by analyzing their answers, we can make the following conclusions about what they would like to see during EFL classes:

- Implementing more speaking activities with interesting topics which touch upon modern-day issues and problems;
- introducing more interactive tasks (e.g., games) and creative tasks;
- introducing videos to the classroom;
- implementing pair/group work to the classroom;
- introducing digital technologies;
- focus on receptive and productive skills;
- focus on grammar;
- focus on enlarging students' vocabulary using different exercises and methods.

Summary

Taking into account the results of the conducted questionnaire we can conclude that TED talks might be what students need in order to optimize and make the EFL classes more effective. Firstly, almost all participant that they would like a material like videos, movies, short-movies to be implemented in the classroom, secondly, the participant mentioned that they want some big topics to be discussed, TED talks is the solution, as we have reviewed earlier these are video lectures given by the leading scientists, artists and famous personalities from various fields, dedicated to current topics and contemporary problems and burning issues of society, which last from 4 to 20 minutes. It was noted that when two channels of perception are involved – auditory and visual, there is an increase in the perception of foreign language speech [19]. The video material combines a different format of material' presentation: image, video sequence, text, action, etc., that is why it can be introduced into various stages of the lesson. Due to the combination of visual and audio support, it is more likely that the student will more likely pay attention to what is happening faster and the material will move from short-term to long-term memory [20]; [21].

According to the participants' answers more speaking activities are need to be involved during the class, so as we have previously stated TED-talks can be used as a source to create communicative tasks based on the content of the video. As we have stated, students also need focus on listening skills, further in this study we gave an example of how listening tasks can be created by the TED-talks implementation.

The use of authentic and/or original materials plays a significant role in teaching process [21]. TED-talks is an authentic material, with language peculiarities: dialects, the manner of the speech and behavior of a native speaker etc. As a result, students are immersed in the cultural field of the speaker. In their works, researchers have repeatedly noted the value of TED talks on the ability to speak in public. Watching such video lectures from students, an image of what a good public speech is, looking at how the speaker behaves: how they present the material, what language they use, what is their body language, etc. Also, it is good for students, so they adopt the speaker's tricks which they can use in the future: the ability to discuss, to attract and hold the attention of the audience, the ability to persuade the audience and to be politically correct while giving a speech [22]; [23], [24].

As we have mentioned earlier EFL learning outcomes are connected to developing the receptive and productive skills. In this stage of the research, we came up with TED-talks task that can be effective to develop listening skills. We created a set of exercises which are based on TED talk "Why our screens make us less happy" by Adam Alter. It can be implemented as an additional learning material to the lesson on the topic or as a home assignment. The set of exercises is created on the OnlineTestPad platform (https://onlinetestpad.com/gjlto5hfx4dyu).

Figure 4 – TED talk "Why our screens make us less happy" by Adam Alter

The aim of the first exercise is that students watch the whole TED- talk, they are to put the topics according to the speech of the lecturer. In the discussion stage, before watching, students can predict what the speaker is going to talk about using the keywords.
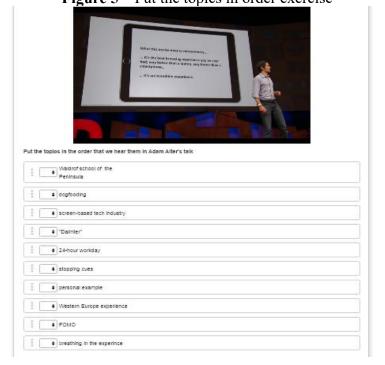
Figure 5 – Put the topics in order exercise

The second exercise challenges them in choosing if the given statements are true or false according to the talk. In the discussion stage, they are to give arguments to their chosen answers.

Figure 6 – True, false exercise

The third task is about filling in the blank with the factual information. They are to listen and complete the blanks, it contains useful vocabulary and factual information: numbers, names and etc.

Figure 7 – Fill in the gaps exercise

After watching a discussion on the talk is welcomed. As we can see from the type of the presented tasks they not only develop and check their listening skills, but they also encourage students to speak, give arguments to support the chosen option, the chosen ''fill in the gaps'' help with enlarging the vocabulary and checks how well they manage with factual information.

Conclusions

Based on the reviewed literature, edutainment is a modern educational technology that combines the use of various tools, in our research we conducted a questionnaire to prove the relevance of TED-talks in EFL classroom and created a set of exercises orientated to the development of receptive skills using them, which gave us a possibility to come up with the main aims of using this tool and it is to:

- increase students' interest and curiosity;
- teach students how to connect with the audience;
- increase the students' motivation to EFL learning process;
- facilitate the learner's desire to self-development;
- facilitate learner's attention span;
- improve the classes quality and broaden student's horizon.

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