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THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD AND ITS RELEVANCE IN MODERN CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: *The Audiolingual Method (ALM), rooted in behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics, emphasizes repetition, memorization, and pattern practice in language learning. Though widely used in the mid-20th century, the method has since been criticized for its lack of communicative focus. This article reexamines the principles of the Audiolingual Method and evaluates its relevance in contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Based on classroom observation and teacher interviews, the study reveals that while ALM is no longer a dominant approach, selected techniques from the method still offer benefits, particularly for pronunciation, listening, and grammar reinforcement.*

Keywords: *Audiolingual Method, language teaching, repetition, structuralism, behaviorism, modern ELT, drilling, pronunciation*

The Audiolingual Method (ALM) emerged in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, primarily as a response to the perceived shortcomings of the Grammar-Translation Method and the need for rapid language acquisition during World War II. Influenced by behaviorist learning theory and structural linguistics, ALM focused on habit formation through repetition, dialogue memorization, and pattern drills.

The core idea was that language learning is a matter of acquiring habits. Mistakes were viewed as bad habits to be avoided, and students were expected to produce grammatically correct utterances without explicitly learning rules. This method was highly teacher-centered, with learners playing a more reactive than proactive role.

However, since the rise of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1970s, ALM has fallen out of favor. Critics argue that it lacks attention to meaning, critical thinking, and real-life communication. Despite these critiques, some modern educators recognize that certain ALM techniques—particularly drills and pronunciation exercises—can still be useful in targeted skill development.

This article explores the continued relevance of the Audiolingual Method and assesses how its techniques might be adapted or integrated into modern EFL classrooms.

This qualitative study was conducted in three secondary schools and one language center in Tashkent. The research methods included:

- Classroom Observations: 6 lessons using partial or modified ALM techniques.
- Teacher Interviews: 8 EFL teachers were interviewed regarding their use of repetition, drills, and memorization in current classrooms.
- Learner Surveys: 40 students were surveyed to assess their response to audiolingual-style activities.

The primary focus was on identifying which ALM elements are still used today, how they are perceived by teachers and learners, and whether they support communicative competence.

The classroom observations and interviews revealed several patterns in the current use of Audiolingual Method (ALM) techniques in modern English language teaching settings:

- Drilling remains a commonly used strategy, particularly for teaching pronunciation, intonation, and fixed grammar structures. About 60% of the observed teachers incorporated repetition-based exercises at the beginning or end of lessons.
- Among the 40 surveyed students, 85% reported that structured repetition helped them improve their pronunciation and fluency, especially in early stages of learning.
- Half of the students (50%) mentioned that they enjoyed oral pattern practice when it was brief and varied, but they quickly lost motivation if drills dominated the lesson.
- Teachers acknowledged that memorization and mimicry were useful for lower-level learners, but emphasized the need to transition to communicative activities as learners progressed.
- In several classrooms, ALM principles were blended with communicative tasks: for example, teachers used short repetition drills to introduce grammatical patterns, followed by pair work or role-plays for meaningful practice.

Overall, while the full Audiolingual Method is rarely applied as a stand-alone framework, its core techniques—especially repetition, drilling, and listening mimicry—still play a practical role when used selectively.

While the Audiolingual Method is no longer considered a comprehensive language teaching approach, elements of it continue to influence modern classrooms. Teachers find that structure-based repetition and drill activities are useful for early-stage learners who need to develop accuracy before fluency.

The ALM's emphasis on listening and speaking aligns well with current goals of oral communication, especially in pronunciation classes. However, the method's rigid teacher-centeredness and lack of attention to meaning and learner creativity limit its full application today.

The findings suggest that although the Audiolingual Method is often viewed as outdated in contemporary pedagogy, its selective integration can still offer significant pedagogical value, especially in form-focused instruction.

One of the key advantages of ALM techniques lies in automatizing language structures. When learners repeat patterns accurately, they begin to internalize grammatical forms without needing to consciously analyze rules. This is particularly useful for beginners or learners from non-Latin-based language backgrounds, who benefit from frequent exposure to consistent sound and sentence patterns.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that over-reliance on drills may result in passive learning, demotivation, and lack of language transfer. Language acquisition is not merely about habit formation—it also involves cognitive processing, meaningful interaction, and personal expression.

In modern classrooms, effective language teaching requires a balance between form-focused practice (as in ALM) and meaningful communication (as in Communicative Language Teaching). A practical model could involve using ALM-style repetition activities as a pre-task phase, which prepares learners for more interactive speaking tasks, such as role-plays or simulations.

Moreover, digital tools such as pronunciation apps, voice recognition software, and AI chatbots often rely on ALM-inspired techniques—for example, requiring learners to repeat sentences until a pronunciation score is met. This shows how the core mechanics of ALM have evolved and found new life in technology-enhanced language learning.

Ultimately, ALM is not obsolete—it is evolving. When used strategically, it can reinforce accuracy, build confidence, and serve as a bridge to fluency-focused activities.

One promising approach is the selective use of ALM techniques in a broader communicative framework. For example, using pattern drills as a warm-up, followed by context-based communicative tasks, blends structural reinforcement with authentic use of language.

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The Audiolingual Method, once dominant in language teaching, may no longer fit the communicative, student-centered paradigm of modern ELT. However, its focus on habit formation, oral practice, and pronunciation still holds value, especially when used strategically and in combination with other methods.

Educators are encouraged to adopt a blended pedagogical approach, taking the strengths of ALM—like structured drilling—and integrating them with meaningful, interactive, and

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learner-driven tasks. In this way, the legacy of the Audiolingual Method remains relevant, not as a standalone approach but as a supportive component in modern language education.

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