

Innovative Tactics in English Language Teaching

S. Sumathi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil., D.G.T.

Abstract

In English Language Teaching, language laboratory, e-learning, e-content, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CAL), PowerPoint presentation, and such, play an important role. Technique is the unique way of doing something. Students record their utterances when doing oral assignments such as group discussion, conducting interviews, producing features, etc. This paper discusses a few practices that are introduced in English classrooms in many colleges in India.

Keyword: Language Learning, E-learning, English Language Teaching, Language Laboratory

E-Learning

The term “e-learning” may be described as “online learning” and “virtual learning”. At home individuals are granted access to programs that offer them the ability to earn online degrees and enrich their lives through expanded knowledge.

Experience in the area of teacher training has shown that teachers attending courses about e-learning, computer notebook-classes, or teaching with new media expect demanding interactive content or multimedia applications. Apparently, teachers widely believe that in order to implement e-learning in the classroom they have to learn how to use flash or other programmes first. It is not easy to convince teachers who are often enthusiastic about and eager to work with the new media, that e-learning is actually about learning and teaching and thus requires didactics above all.

In particular in computer notebook-classes, the development from teacher-centred to student-centred learning often results in content-centred learning, which reduces the students’

activities to mouse clicks in an interactive, content-based environment. This development is far from the concept of the construction of knowledge through free action in realistic situations. Teachers in notebook classes have a universal tool as their disposal, which combined with a bit of imagination can help them to find new ways of learning. In this context, Eva Grostenberger has developed a new method of language teaching, which relegates technology and content to the background and focuses on the individual student's language work as cognitive activity.

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Just like teachers, government agencies in Asia specially the Eastern part take special interest in Task based language teaching (TBLT), a much more modern and advanced version of language teaching. TBLT in the initial stages proved very successful in the primary and secondary schools for its readymade and appealing tasks. In this connection it may be said that TBLT helped communication language teaching (CLT) to make room for itself as a language teaching technique. Many methods, techniques and approaches like Grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, functional national method etc., were used in Bangladesh in teaching and learning a foreign language. From time to time various new methods and approaches replaced the older ones with new tips, techniques and with extremely new prospects.

“In the long search for the best way of teaching a foreign language, hundreds of different approaches of methods have been devised”. (Azam 2005) In this connection the most popular and effective method which has already become the most popular in the west - communicative English, started making educators all over the globe feel “that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate, using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied”. (Galloway 1993) As a result, Bangladesh students who are good in English can correspond with a foreigner very smoothly in written form without any hesitation. But the same person proves dumbfounded and silent in face-to-face meeting and cannot write for journals of education and practice.

Technology in English Language Teaching – Speaking

The introduction of student computer notebooks in the language classroom has been a subject of high controversy in Austrian schools. Whereas the notebook's function in

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improving students' writing, reading and listening skills has been widely accepted, it is still generally believed that in order to practice speaking, the notebook has to remain closed. The following method is going to challenge this point of view. Based on Wolfgang Scharl's discussion of sound editing in the classroom, it claims that together with a microphone and free audio recording software, the notebook can make a significant contribution to improving students' oral skills - while not making use of any pre-fabricated e-learning content. Roughly speaking, in this teaching scenario the students are required to record themselves when doing communicative language tasks such as conducting interviews, telephoning or discussing topics in small groups and to upload their contributions on the LMS (Learn Management System) platform.

Obviously, the general idea of having students actively speak a language in the face of a machine is not new. In fact, using machines to allow students to work with the target language, had been done before. In Austrian schools, the introduction of analogue language learning labs thirty years ago had compared their own utterances. Nowadays these labs are rarely used or have been removed altogether. Only in a few academic institutions have they been replaced by expensive modern computer-assisted labs, which would arguably offer a larger scope of activities, though not necessarily in the area of speaking. Any rate, the simple transition from analogue towards digital formats does not account for the innovation of the method outlined in this paper. It goes beyond the practices of the conventional language lab and is different in its overall approach.

Innovative Methods, Materials and Practices in ELT

In most of the classrooms in India conventional teaching methods, materials and teaching techniques based on prescribed texts and syllabus are used homogeneously in spite of vast differences in classrooms and level of students' abilities. The traditional methods which largely depend on lecturing and rote learning reduce English language learning to mechanical memorization and miserably fail in developing language competency among the students.

These stereotype methods and teaching material make the learning a monotonous activity and create distaste among the students by reducing them to mere passive receptors of language and not active participants in the learning process. Therefore, the necessity to deviate from the grand methods and materials and to use innovative material and techniques

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of teaching has been strongly felt. Use of novel teaching techniques like miming, dramatics, creating novel activities and tasks and participating in the same and the use of authentic materials such as songs, cartoons, advertisements, sports commentaries, episode from films, local folk literature etc. Teachers can involve learners directly in the learning process by providing them direct experience by assuring their participation directly in the learning process.

By using authentic teaching material available around him and the material that is connected to the experiential and background knowledge of the students, an English class room can be made interactive, interesting, enthusiastic and learner-friendly. The proposed anthology invites scholarly contributions pertaining to the use of innovative and novel teaching practices and materials which can be used as supplement to traditional ELT practices which need reorientation.

- Technology based innovative teaching and learning strategies
- Using innovative tasks for ELT
- Teaching pronunciation through music
- Using post-traditional method pedagogy for ELT
- ELT through blogging, E-mails and sms.

Benefits of the New Method

The advantages of the students personal notebooks, free audio recording software and ideally microphones, which can be conveniently replaced by the headsets for obvious financial reasons. Having these equipment to work, not with pre-fabricated material, but with material that they have generated themselves, material that is meaningful to them and therefore easier to engage with. At this stage, students obviously need some guidance from the teacher, who can easily access all the contributions from the platform and report back to the students either in person or electronically.

Furthermore, the importance of evaluating and describing one's language proficiency as outlined above is endorsed by the European Language Portfolio as one of its main aims. In order to set personal language goals and plan further learning, students have to learn to reflect on their language - and this includes written as well as spoken language, the latter which is often neglected in this respect. In the teaching scenario under discussion, the LMS platform offers teachers and learners a means of keeping a record of the students' oral performance;

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documenting their progress in the course of the academic year, thereby providing a date for the students' electronic portfolios.

It therefore supports teachers when assessing students' oral linguistic competence and facilitates self-assessment. Speaking gains importance in the classroom - it becomes something the teacher can actually claim from his/her students in the same way as a written piece of homework. In fact, oral tasks are no longer confined to the classroom only. Speaking as homework becomes compulsory, it has to be handed in, in digital form in the same way as any other written assignment. Admittedly, the assignments for practice at home have to be changed to allow for individual work.

Conclusion

As students tend to put the emphasis on completing a set task rather than on learning something from it, encouraging students to reflect on their work has probably been the most difficult part of this method, but also the most valuable. Generally, the implementation of the method takes a considerable amount of time, because the students and teacher have to get used to the new teaching scenario as well as the technology involved. Furthermore, the method, stimulating as it may be for students, is generally time-consuming for the teacher, both in the preparation and feedback stage. Thus the English teacher must always be friendly with the learners to identify their problems, to be able to rectify them for the students in a friendly, non-threatening way.

S. Sumathi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil., D.G.T.

Assistant Professor

Department of English

SAC Women's College

Cumbum

Tamilnadu

India

sumathirose16@gmail.com