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Innovations In English Language Teaching – Bridging The Gap Between Theory And Practice

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I. Introduction

Education is an engine for the growth and progress of any society. It not only imparts knowledge, skills and inculcates values, but is also responsible for building human capital which breeds, drives and sets technological innovation and economic growth. English, the official language of the entire world is a very tricky language to teach. In fact every language varies to teach. English is a very old language and has undergone many forms changes from Proto English derived from the Latin and the German culture to the Modern English which was established after in the post Renaissance period. Each version was simpler than its previous. Present day English is the simplest adaptation of a very old Language and yet it is still difficult to teach this language effectively especially to those who speak English as a second language.

English language teaching has acquired greater attention and importance as never before in the context of its position as a global language. As an immediate offshoot of this scenario, the demand for Communicative Skills in English has been on the rise in all fields. Obviously the demand has brought a lot of pressure on English teachers to perform and produce good results. Consequently English Teachers and class room practices in teaching English have come into sharp focus for the assessment of the state and stage of teaching English in Indian classrooms. English Language Teaching is now at a crucial juncture as a number of methods, approaches and innovations have been discussed in series of seminars and conferences arranged at various colleges and universities in India. A few of them have already been in practice for a considerable time but found to be short of expectations in improving the language skills of the stakeholders. It needs a lot of motivation, innovation and commitment on the part of all concerned to sincerely and seriously take a new approach, an experiment or a theory through the process of practice from a superficial level to a deeper one.

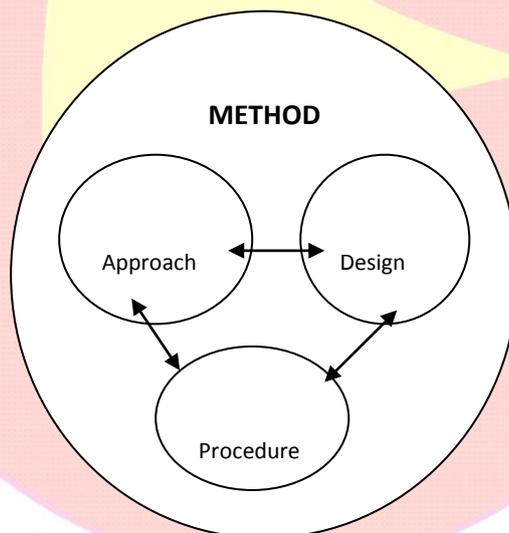
Mostly English is taught in a very orthodox manner. No doubt that the basic teaching is needed. Teaching the alphabets and the formation of the words is essential and a must. But there is something that is even more important. The children must be able to speak the words and understand their meaning before writing them down. The foundation to teach English can only be taught using the orthodox methods of teaching the alphabets and the words and the rules. But then teaching only the rules is found to be boring by most students and it is because of this that they lose interest in learning the language. Although there is no way other than the traditional one to teach the basics of the language these methods must be tweaked a bit so as to appeal to the students. When it comes to teaching English to students of higher classes who already know the basics the traditional methods generally tend to yield poorer results that

innovative methods. This has already been proven by methods implemented like use of stories, poems, movies, books and newspapers etc. These methods help the students learn the language better without them actually realizing and also it keeps their interest. This paper will discuss a few of such innovative Approaches, Methods and Techniques in English Language Teaching.

The Distinction between Approach, Design and Procedure

Let us try to know the distinction between Approach, Design and Procedure which was developed by Richards and Rodgers as, encompassed within the overall concept of Method, “an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice” (Richards & Rodgers 1985: 16) where

- Approach refers to the beliefs and theories about language, language learning and teaching that underlie a method
- Design relates the theories of language and learning to the form and function of teaching materials and activities in the classroom;
- Procedure concerns the techniques and practices employed in the classroom as consequences of particular approaches and designs.



The above diagram shows the relation between methods, approaches, design and procedure. Definitely it is fruitful for us to know. After the brief remarks on it lets us move towards different Approaches, Methods and Techniques in English Language Teaching.

There are several approaches, methods and techniques in English language teaching.

I. The Grammar-Translation Method

The Classical or Grammar-Translation method represents the tradition of language teaching adopted in western society and developed over centuries of teaching not only the classical languages such as Latin and Greek, but also foreign languages. The focus was on studying grammatical rules and morphology, doing written exercises, memorizing vocabulary, translating texts from and prose passages into the language. It remained popular in modern language pedagogy, even after the introduction of newer methods.

The major characteristics and drawbacks of Grammar-Translation:

- Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language;
- Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words;
- Long, elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given;
- Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words;
- Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early;
- Little attention is paid to the context of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis;
- Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue;
- Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.
- Lack of potential for lively communication.

II. The Direct Method

The Direct Method which is called as Berlitz Method for it was Charles Berlitz who marketed and popularized it. The basic premise of the Direct Method was that one should attempt to learn a second language in much the same way as children learn their first language. The method emphasised oral interaction, spontaneous use of language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammar rules. The major characteristics and drawbacks of the Direct Method as summarized by Richards and Rodgers as follows (2001: 12)

- Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language;
- Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught;
- Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around questions-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small intensive classes;
- Grammar was taught inductively;
- New teaching points were taught through modelling and practice;
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, pictures; Abstract vocabulary was taught through association of ideas;
- Both speech and listening comprehension were taught;
- Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.
- The lack of insight into the reality of the classroom situation for most learners,
- In its aspiration to a mastery of the language that few could achieve.

III. The Audio-Methods

The Audio-lingual /Audiovisual Method is derived from "The Army Method," so called because it was developed through a U.S. Army programme devised after World War II to produce speakers proficient in the languages of friend and foes. In this method, grounded in the habit formation model of behaviourist psychology and on a Structural Linguistics theory of language, the emphasis was on memorisation through pattern drills and conversation practices rather than promoting communicative ability.

The Characteristics of the Audio-Methods:

- New material is presented in dialogue form;
- There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning
- Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis taught one at a time;
- Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills;
- There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than by deductive explanation;
- Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context;
- There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids;
- Great importance is attached to pronunciation;
- Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted;
- Successful responses are immediately reinforced;
- There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances;
- There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.

(Adapted from Prator & Celce-Murcia 1979)

IV. The Oral-Situational Approach and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

This resembles the Audiolingual approach as it is based on a structural syllabus but it emphasizes the meanings expressed by the linguistic structures, not just the forms, and also the situations or contexts chosen to practice the structures. It can be found in courses dating from the 1970s which are now criticised for not achieving the hoped-for results.

As the Audio-method and Oral-situational approach were limited by their neglect of cognitive learning, the drill-based approach in the classroom re-emerged in early Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software where it was perceived to motivate pupils and develop autonomous study and learning. CALL is now more sophisticated and can foster cognitive learning as well.

V. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged during the 1980s and 1990s which concentrated on the communicative functions of language and as the norm in second language and immersion teaching. As a broadly-based approach, there are any number of definitions and interpretations, but the following interconnected characteristics offered by Brown (2001: 43) provide a useful overview:

- Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intertwine the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic.
- Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
- Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.

- Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.
- Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.
- The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing donor of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others.

The communicative approach was developed mainly in the context of English Second Language (ESL) teaching through which one can relatively easily reach a fair level of communication in English.

Besides these there are other ways/methods which a teacher can adopt for better results.

❖ **Enacting the stories**

Stories form a very integral part of teaching a language. These stories help teach the students about the formation of sentences and how to express their thoughts and a lot of other things and plus they help in keeping the students interest alive.

The students can enact the stories or the plays. In this way the students are personally engaged with the stories. They can bring their own interpretation of the character to life. It is interesting for the students to understand the characters and put themselves in their positions. It engages their creativity by allowing them to create the entire set, assign the characters and play it out according to what they had imagined. It also helps them understand other people's interpretation of the story and helps them have a healthy conversation about it which again helps them in learning the language. For example if Julius Caesar was taught using the traditional methods of questions and answers the student would never understand the deep emotions of Brutus, the cunningness of Cassius, the loyalty of Antony, the tragedy of war, the brilliance in Antony's speech and many other such aspects of the story for which the story of Julius Caesar was written by Shakespeare. On the other hand if such stories are enacted then every intention of the story becomes clear. The students have to immerse themselves into the atmosphere of the story and they have to put them in their positions. This entire process has many benefits besides being a very effective method of teaching the language. This method brings about the total learning experience that was meant to be provided by the story and in the end the student will definitely be able to answer questions without even preparing for it as an exam, besides the entire process is fun and not at all boring. Hence it ensures the learning process is complete.

❖ **Teaching through conversations**

Conversations are by far the most useful ways of teaching the language. When a child learns his or her mother tongue it is by the conversations that takes place between them and others or by listening to the conversations made by the others. Hence conversations form a very important part of the teaching process. The sentence construction and the grammar is not something that can be entirely taught by rules. They have to be taught intuitively. That can only

happen through a lot of reading and a lot of listening. This can be taken care of easily as every conversation needs a topic. The topic can be given to the students in form of written documents which they have to first read then form an opinion and then have a conversation about it or it can be spoken out and then they can listen, understand and also take part in the conversation. The participation and other aspects of the conversation can always be evaluated through points which will also push the students to take part in the conversation. These conversations have to be general. They have to happen as if friends are talking to each other. This way the students are comfortable in expressing themselves in the best possible way. This process may take some time but in the end it would be the most efficient one in teaching the language.

❖ **Teaching through games**

This is a very interesting method of teaching. Students and children generally tend to like games and want to play them more and more. The games part of learning would help the students keep their interest as the desire to win is very strong. It keeps us going and when included with different aspects of learning the learning process would continue almost throughout the day without the children getting tired or bored of studying.

❖ **Word games**

The most important part of any language is the vocabulary. To understand the meaning of the words and to use them in day to day life is a very difficult task and games can help the students overcome this difficulty. Games like scrabble, housie etc. have been designed for this specific purpose. These games are just based on words and help the students develop their vocabulary.

❖ **Competitions**

Most of the times competitions like debates and elocutions also help the help the students a lot in learning the language as the aspect of the competitions keep them at the best in conversations. It forces them to use the best possible construction of sentences to put forward their opinions and to use good vocabulary etc. This is a very important tool in helping them learn the language. Also these competitions help them address large crowds which is again is a very important part of personality development.

❖ **Creative assignments**

Assignments help the students learn something on their own and most of the times they have to research on something then write something up on it.

❖ **Help from the multimedia**

Multimedia sources like songs, movies, TV series, magazines, newspapers play a very vital role in improving our language. The teacher uses multimedia to modify the contents of the material. It helps him/her to represent in a more meaningful way, using different media elements. These media elements can be converted into digital form, modified and customized for the final presentation. By incorporating digital media elements into the project, the students are able to learn better since they use multiple sensory modalities, which would make them more motivated to pay more attention to the information presented and retain the information better. It

is very helpful as it does not feel like education. This is something that the students will do in their spare time. The songs are the best way to communicate how to use a language to express our feelings. Movies are a very common past time but apart from that most of the times they are also very instructional and educational. Also this method appeals to the students as most of the times they are able to connect with the songs and the movies which help them understand the meaning of expressions, usage of tools of the language like comparisons, personifications etc. These sources help them understand why such tools are necessary and also help them understand their usage. Hence this method is again very effective in teaching the language. Traditional methods of reading newspapers and books, novels are also very good methods to teach the language. When the traditional methods are modified along with some innovative ideas the entire learning and the teaching process is enriched and guarantees a success in efficient learning. These are some of the innovative and creative ways of teaching the English Language.

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