

Teaching English to Engineering Students through Innovative Techniques

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Abstract

Today we live in a fast and growing competitive world wherein proficiency, excellence and empowerment through education is the utmost requirement. The role of the teacher has undergone a sea change and the teacher has to address to the educational needs of the students with diverse learning options. With the enhancement in technology and innovative methods should be employed to make learning more enjoyable and effective. The biggest challenge for an English teacher is to make the class more attractive to young learners and at the same time ensures learners excel in examination. The focus of this paper is upon improving the proficiency of English through the various tasks based activities. Internet plays a vital role in putting this method into practice. The paper suggests some feasible ways of improving communication skills and promoting students creative, critical and analytical thinking in ELT programmes in an interesting way. It also exposes various ways by which classroom activities can be used to involve students so that they can have opportunities to act as performers themselves.

INTRODUCTION

A language is a systematic means of communication by the use of sounds or conventional symbols. It is the code we all use to express ourselves and communicate to others. It may become one tool that opens windows to the world, unlocks doors to opportunities, and expands our minds to new ideas. Today it is the language of leaders, language of ITC, business, fashion, so on and so forth. It is the most important and crucial skill to have for personal success and a global formula for learning, it's an international means for communication and expressing one's feelings anytime and anywhere.

Teaching must include two major components sending and receiving information. The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. Moreover, opportunities to learn English are provided in many different ways such as through formal instruction, travel, and study abroad, as well as through the media and the Internet. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Learners set themselves demanding goals. The demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever. This paper deals with the traditional and innovative methods and approaches of teaching which are critically examined, evaluated and some modifications in the delivery of knowledge is suggested. As such, the strengths and weaknesses of each teaching methodology are identified and probable modifications that can be included in traditional methods are suggested. It also examines the present scenario of English language teachers as regards Information Communication Technology (ICT) integration and tries to determine if ICT skills of English language teachers in the light of existing infrastructure facilities are adequate to promote English language teaching. The field of language education is changing at an ever-increasing rate. Traditional notions of education are giving way to newer, more innovative ways of thinking about how to learn, teach and acquire knowledge. This research report has been prepared to help educational leaders and teachers understand current trends in language education. If language teachers teach as they taught earlier, then one may not achieve the required goals of teaching English in the present global scenario. Therefore, it has to convert education into a sport and learning process has to generate interest in the students and motivate them to stay back in the institution than to run away from it. English language should become a fun and thrill to them rather than burden and boredom. This paper deals with the importance of teaching English to fulfill the ever-growing demands of English. The methods and approaches adopted or followed by teachers in the past to teach English language, the lacunae in their language teaching which is the second language for both teacher and students is discussed. Challenges before teachers in present day English language teaching, are taken up in this study. The way in which students can put their learning into practice in day-to-day use to fulfill their practical demands through effective communication skills apart from gaining command over English language is highlighted.

Methods and approaches to teaching English have developed rapidly, especially in the previous four decades. It is important that language learners and training managers, as well as teachers, understand the various teaching methods and techniques so learners are able to navigate the market, make educated choices, and boost their enjoyment of learning a language. Each teaching method is based on a particular vision of understanding the

language or of learning processes, often using specific techniques and materials used in a set sequence. Language teachers adopted and followed some or all of the different methodologies listed below to teach the language. The main teaching methodologies are listed below in the chronological order of their development:-

Grammar Translation Method:

Sometimes also known as, the Classical Method, this traditional teaching technique was used to teach Latin and Greek and was particularly in vogue during the 16th Century. The focus at this time was on the translation of texts, grammar, and rote learning of vocabulary. There was no emphasis on speaking and listening comprehension because Latin and Greek were taught more as academic subjects rather than a means of oral communication.

This teaching method is still common in many countries and institutions around the world, and still appeals to those interested in languages from an intellectual or linguistic perspective. However, it does little to improve your ability to use the language for oral communication. As a teacher, you have already studied some of the approaches and methods used in language teaching. There are some features below:

- Learning language through detailed analysis of grammar rules ;
- Reading and writing are the major focus;
- Vocabulary selection is based on reading texts;
- Words are taught through dictionary study, memorization and bilingual word lists;
- Translation is a central technique.

Direct Method:

This approach is also known as the 'oral' or 'natural' method, originated around the 1900s as an alternative to the traditional grammatical translation method. At this time, teachers were starting to experiment with teaching and educational models as previous techniques were failing to improve spoken communication. The focus is on good pronunciation, with spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little grammar analysis. This Method is based on the direct involvement of the student when speaking, and listening to, the foreign language in common everyday situations. Consequently, there is lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little if any analysis of grammar rules and syntax. The focus of the lessons is on good pronunciation, often introducing learners to phonetic symbols before they see standard writing examples. This method continues to provoke interest and enthusiasm today, but it is not an easy methodology to use in a classroom situation. It requires small classes and high student motivation, and in the artificial environment of a classroom, it is difficult to generate natural situations of understanding and guarantee sufficient practice for everyone. However, variants of this method have been developed where the teacher allows limited explanations in the student's native language and explains some grammar rules to correct common errors a student may make when speaking. The situation is no better even at the college level as Robert Bellarmine observes, "The most serious problem in the teaching of English in our country is the appallingly small quantity and atrociously poor quality of English to which our learners are exposed." [Ref 2]

Audio-lingual Method:

This approach to learning is similar to the Direct Method, in that the lesson takes place entirely in the target language. This method was widely used in the 1950s and 1960s, and the emphasis was not on the understanding of words, but rather on the acquisition of structures and patterns in common everyday dialogue. These patterns are elicited, repeated and tested until the responses, given by the student in the foreign language are automatic.

Some characteristics of this method are:

- Drills are used to teach structural patterns ;
- Set phrases are memorized with a focus on intonation;
- Grammatical explanations are kept to a minimum ;
- Vocabulary is taught in context ;
- Audio-visual aids are used ;
- Focus is on pronunciation ;
- Correct responses are positively reinforced immediately

Audio-lingual Method is still in use today, though normally as a part of individual lessons rather than as the foundation of the course. But this extensive memorization, repetition and over-learning of patterns were the key to the method's success, as students could often see immediate results, but it was also its weakness. The method's insistence on repetition and memorization of standard phrases ignored the role of context and knowledge in language learning. As the study of linguistics developed, it was discovered that language was not acquired

through a process of habit formation, and that errors were not necessarily bad. It was also claimed that the methodology did not deliver an improvement in communicative ability that lasted over the long term.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

It is also called, the modern standard method. Communicative language learning is an engaging development in the field of ancient language acquisition. It opens numerous opportunities for creative instruction, and may serve to captivate students and teachers alike for years to come. This Method is in reality an umbrella term - a broad approach rather than a specific teaching methodology, and has now become the accepted standard in English language teaching.

Margie S. Berns, an expert in the field of communicative language teaching, writes in explaining Firth's view that "language is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational, context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak)". [Ref 3]

This Communicative approach emphasizes the ability to communicate the message in terms of its meaning, instead of concentrating exclusively on grammatical perfection or phonetics. Therefore, the understanding of the second language is evaluated in terms of how much the learners have developed their communicative abilities and competencies. The Communicative Language Teaching method has various characteristics that distinguish it from previous methods:

- Understanding occurs through active student interaction in the foreign language ;
- Teaching occurs by using authentic English texts;
- Students not only learn the second language but they also learn strategies for understanding ;
- Importance is given to learners' personal experiences and situations, which are considered as an invaluable contribution to the content of the lessons;
- Using the new language in unrehearsed contexts creates learning opportunities outside the classroom

The most common educational model applied in the context of the Communicative Method is the Functional-Notional approach, which emphasizes the organization of the syllabus. This breaks down the use of language into Five functional categories that can be more easily analyzed: personal (feelings, etc.), interpersonal (social and working relationships), directive (influencing others), referential (reporting about things, events, people or language itself), and imaginative (creativity and artistic expression). These five broad functions are, then delivered by the teacher in the classroom using the '3 Ps' teaching model, which stand for Presentation, Practice and Production.

Presentation: The new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

Practice: Students practice, using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

Production: Students practice, using the new structure in different contexts, often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern.

Today the professional language teacher has a good grounding in the various techniques and new approaches, and they know and understand the history and evolution of teaching methodologies. The modern teacher will in fact use a variety of methodologies and approaches, choosing techniques from each method that they consider effective and applying them according to the learning context and objectives. They prepare their lessons to facilitate the understanding of the new language being taught and do not rely on one specific best method.

English for Specific Purposes:

In the earlier days, English was just like a Library language, but now that notion has changed totally. At present, the challenges visible before the English language teachers are diverse and it is necessary for them to shape up accordingly to meet the demands of the day. It plays a vital part in every profession with respect its importance and demand. Every profession has its own professional terminology, which is used frequently in that particular profession. So, it would be more efficient to teach them the specific kinds of language and communicative skills needed for particular roles, (For example, certain terms used by the doctors, lawyers, engineer, flight attendant, pilot, biologist etc) rather than just to concentrate on more general English. This led to the discipline of needs analysis – the use of observation, surveys, interviews, situation analysis, and analysis of language samples collected in different settings – in order to determine the kinds of communication learners would need to master

if they were in specific occupational or educational roles and the language features of particular settings. The focus of needs analysis is to determine the specific characteristics of a language when it is used for specific rather than general purposes. Such differences might include:

- Differences in vocabulary choice
- Differences in grammar
- Differences in the kinds of texts commonly occurring
- Differences in functions
- Differences in the need for particular skills

Innovative Techniques or Methods of Teaching English:

Teaching English depends on the potential excellence, skills and update knowledge of English teachers. The role of English teacher in present context has remarkably changed because of various factors such as social, cultural, economic and technology developments across the globe. The subject of teaching English at this level is very wide and the difficulties the teacher faces are at large. Due to globalization the world is changing rapidly, hence a teacher has to improve and update knowledge of innovative techniques to meet the demand of changing era. English language teachers must be innovative, imaginative, and resourceful, have thorough knowledge of the subject, and adopt new techniques to change socio, economic statuses of the country. At this point English language teachers have four important responsibilities:

- There is needed to know the availability of the online resources and to make language-learning effective.
- Need to know context based selections of the resources according to students group and develops suitable activities that will create opportunities for enhancing both language and digital skills.
- Need to teach the skills necessary to function in the digital age, including reading and writing digital text and communicating and publishing online.
- Digital literacy skills are done seamlessly and in an integrated manner so that the language course is a coherent whole rather than a collection of loose components.

English Language Teaching with a Specialization in ICT (Information Communication Technology) and Multimedia: Literacy in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is fundamental to life in our modern technological society. It is a valuable tool to enhance teaching and learning. For teachers ICT is a professional resource, a mode of classroom delivery, and a source of valid and valuable text types. For students, ICT provides opportunities to communicate more effectively and to develop literacy skills including skills in critical literacy. It is a valuable tool for researching, composing and responding; and viewing and representing in English. The use of ICT in the English classroom extends beyond its motivational value to address key outcomes of the syllabus, and allow students to become competent users as well as consumers in English. Research suggests that incorporating ICT into the English curriculum can:

- Improve writing and reading skills ;
- Develop speaking and listening skills;
- Support collaboration, creativity, independent learning and reflection ;

As an interactive and collaborative medium, ICT allows responding, composing, and publication to be easily shared and offers students the opportunity to explore the language of texts more creatively and develop as speakers, writers and readers for an ever-widening range of purposes and audiences. ICT can enable students to:

- Access information and respond to a widening range of texts;
- Organize and present information in a variety of forms;
- Broaden the range of audiences for their work;
- Compose a widening range of texts for a broad range of purposes;
- Compose for real audiences. ICT can support them in their choice of genre for audience and purpose;
- Identify key characteristics and features of text;
- Develop understanding of language and critical literacy

The utilization and integration of ICT tools can indeed assist students in acquiring English Language competency as well as enhance the quality of their learning experience. The discussion of access and equity therefore, must be broadened to include a debate about access to effective models of ICT for teaching and learning. Such an approach moves the debate from counting computers, examining the technology budget, and calculating the number of hours, which students spend on computers to a consideration of differentiating between the different ways in which the technology is used.

Now days, using technology for language learning has become a part of our day-to-day life. It plays a vital role in the process of teaching and learning. It can be used to learn a foreign language like English. English and computers have seemed to go together. Computers and the programs, which make them useful, were largely the invention of English-speaking countries. The hardware and software wants the needs of the English language. The computer operators interacted with the programs using instructions in English. The Internet illustrates the way technologies have been converging – television, telephone, music and new consumer technologies, such as multimedia computers and ‘Net TV’, bring the English language in homes, schools and workshops. Therefore, it can be say that Computers have made language learning easy and made the language learning process interesting and enjoyable for both teacher and student throughout the world. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has reduced the burden of the teacher whose teaching methods will be out dated to teach language to present day generation of the world. It is described as one of the interactive methods that can help a learner according to their own ability to learn, which enriches their language skills. CALL enables the learner to look beyond the conventional mode of learning and encourages self-learning.

By using multimedia technology, that is the combination of various digital media types such as text, images, audio and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey information to an audience. It is developed to respond to students different learning styles. The basic purpose of this is to focus on sound, text images, videos, animation and interesting context that can be created and accessed from electronic devices such as computer, mp3 players, cell- phones, and iPods. The teacher uses multimedia to modify the contents of the material. It will help the teacher to represent in a more meaningful way, using different media elements. These media elements can be converted into digital form, which modified and customized for the final presentation. Moreover, by using multimedia in the classroom, the students can better understand the lessons by cultivating self-thinking ability with integration of four skills. There are, in general, four language skills, each based upon the modality of emphasis. These are the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills. Generally, it is emphasized that first teach listening, then speaking, then reading and writing. Logically, the four skills are related in complementary ways. Both listening and reading are receptive skills — modes of understanding. Speaking and writing are productive skills. Thus, the four basic skills are related to each other by virtue of both the mode of communication (oral or written) and the direction of communication — either receiving or producing messages. Even this is use full for the learner to learn and stimulate retention by recorded classes and presentation. Moreover, this tool can develop all four skills of language for both English language learners and native speakers who used videos clip to illustrate vocabulary items showed greater improvements in vocabulary knowledge then those who did not receive the multimedia instructions.

In this milieu, it is time to shed away our postcolonial indignation and get into the right track of learning effective language skills. Language teaching involves many methods. All the available methods may be appropriate to different contexts. There is no one single method strongly recommended in the teaching of English since the level of the learners differs from one another. So, it becomes inevitable for a teacher to know the different methods of teaching & learning awareness of variety of methods help him to apply the relevant method in his classroom successfully. Ultimately, a teacher tries his best to impart knowledge as the way he understood it. So, any communication methods that serve this purpose without destroying the objective could be considered as innovative methods of teaching. The use of innovative methods in educational institutions has the potential not only to improve education, but also to empower people, strengthen governance and galvanize the effort to achieve the human development.

Conclusion:

To meet the present day challenges in teaching English, first, English should not be treated as a subject as it is to be used actively in interacting with one another throughout the world. By using conventional methods, maximum portion of class time will be wasted in exercises and drilling, dealing with grammar and pronunciation, which takes away a large portion of class time. These methods were mostly used to develop basic skills of language learning such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, but by following these methods, listening and speaking skills were neglected, as students cannot put their language in practice. In the era of competitive world, where the majority of the students are attempting GRE & TOEFL, good listening and speaking skills become an absolute necessity. According to academic research, linguists have demonstrated that there is no one single best method for everyone in all contexts, and that no one method is inherently superior to the other methods i.e. listed above. Also, it is not always possible - or appropriate - to apply the same methodology to all learners, who have different objectives, environments and learning needs. A few more things can be incorporated into this teaching approach to maximize the learning benefits for the students. First, encourage students to discuss about the

material in small groups and eventually discuss that with the entire class. Second, prepare some questions related to the listening material for the students to discuss. Third, introduce the use of body language in class. By integrating the above concepts and teaching points with the innovative approach reported above, a teacher can successfully lead English conversation classes of any size. Moreover, it can make out that the Information and communication technology (ICT) has made many innovations in the field of teaching and made a drastic change from the old paradigm of teaching and learning.

In addition to these, our faculty too should update their knowledge, skills and should acquire thoroughness over their syllabus to meet the demands of globalization since English is seen as a key educational investment in this world. If provided with the latest language teaching tools and with the support of technology, one can teach the language effectively and motivate the students towards language learning. In the new paradigm of learning, the role of student is more important than teachers. The concepts of paperless and penless classroom are emerging as an alternative to the old teaching learning method. Now days, there is democratization of knowledge and the role of the teacher is changing to that of facilitator. Its need to have interactive teaching and this changing role of education is inevitable with the introduction of multimedia technology and the spawning of a technologically-perceptive generation of youths.

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