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INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN THE ENGLISH CLASS ROOM

K.GUEJALATCHOUMY¹, Dr. SHANTHI SIMON²

Department of Humanities

^{1, 2}Pondicherry Engineering College, Pondicherry



ABSTRACT

English language teaching has undergone a sea change in the recent years. The role of the teacher has progressed from that of an instructor to a facilitator. The approach to teaching has moved from being teacher centric to learner centric. Gone are the days when students could do textbook based grammar exercises but were baffled when it came to its application in real life scenario. Grammar exercises have now been replaced by interesting activities like role plays, extempore speeches, debates, group discussions, storytelling and presentations. Thanks to technological advancements teachers now have started using them to make the class more educative, pragmatic and thought provoking. This paper attempts to take a look at the reasons for using and the significance of the above-mentioned approaches, methods and techniques which have been recently introduced in the English classroom, resulting in a paradigm shift in the teaching – learning process.

Key Words: paradigm shift , facilitator, innovation, classroom activities, text book to practical

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English language teaching has undergone a sea change in the recent years. In the past English language was seen as yet another subject which involved lessons and exercises based on those lessons. However, now-a-days English language is seen as an important tool that facilitates one to obtain and sustain a career. Apart from the particular subject which the student specializes in (hard skills) it has become mandatory that the student also possesses soft skills (of which the ability to communicate in English contributes a major part). This change in the market demand which is a byproduct of globalization and the new age understanding of the term 'education' as the culmination of placement process has suddenly put English language teaching on a new pedestal, thereby, forcing it to introduce newer approaches, techniques and methods to sustain the interest in the students and to attain the goal which is to get 'placed'. Gone are the days when students could do textbook based grammar exercises but were baffled when it came to its application in real life scenario.

With the introduction of Content Based Instruction (CBI), traditional grammar exercises have now been replaced by innovative tasks like role plays, extempore, debates, group discussions and presentations.

The biggest advantage of the content based approach is that students gain a very clear understanding of which specific rule of grammar they should use in a given structure and when best to make use of that structure in real life context. This method helps the students to gain confidence in communication unlike the traditional method where students were excellent in doing grammar based exercises in textbooks but were completely diffident when it came to its application in real life.

As Nunan (2004) has rightly summed up the benefits of content-based instruction as an "organic, analytical approach to language development" and "a framework within which learners can have sustained engagement on both content mastery and second language acquisition" (p.132). He adds that this method increases intrinsic motivation and engages the learner more actively in the learning process, and also states that CBI is very much in line with the principles of task-based language teaching. Brinton (2003, cited in Nunan, p. 132) has identified five principles of CBI. They are,

- Instructional decisions are based on content rather than language criteria
- Skills should be integrated as much as possible
- Students should be involved actively in all phases of the learning process
- Content should be chosen for its relevance to student's lives, interests and /or academic goals
- Authentic materials and tasks should be selected (Nunan 2004, p.4)

Nunan (2006) has proposed a task-based framework based on units of instruction that leads students through tasks and exercises which may or may not focus on form, but focus on "holistic outcomes in the form of written reports, spoken presentations and substantial small-group conversations that lead to decision-making outcomes". Beyond language acquisition this method also creates the right environment for students to also exhibit various soft skills which is the need of the hour. For example, role plays give room for students to be creative, think on the feet, identify and classify the situation as formal, informal or semi-formal and accordingly use vocabulary and express the dialogues within the given time frame. Extempore speech on the other hand assesses the students' ability to understand the given topic, interpret it and confidently talk about the topic in an interesting manner with a clear introduction, body and conclusion with the appropriate body language (including voice modulation, intonation, pitch, stress, pronunciation and accent). It gives the learner an opportunity to wet his/her analytical, reasoning and communication skills. Similar is the case of story telling where the learner gets to be creative as well as expressive. Story telling sessions are encouraged in the corporate world these days and reports say that these sessions help in increasing productivity at workplace.

Debates help students to demonstrate their ability to interpret the topic, present their ideas/views/opinions on the given topic, listening skills and presence of mind in responding confidently to the points of the previous speaker. In addition, one of the pre-requisites is that the student should have very good general knowledge and be aware of the various social, political and economical aspects of the issues that happen around us.

Group Discussions are another platform through which students can exhibit their reading skills, their range and depth of knowledge on the given topic, their ability to form opinions on various issues, their ability to substantiate their opinions with ample examples using the right diction, clarity in expression and also their soft skills which include leadership skills, time management skills, presence of mind, team coordination, assertiveness to name a few.

Presentations also help the students to work on the given topic, collate information, take notes, pick out the relevant information, arrange them in logical sequence, prepare visual aids, practise for the presentation with the appropriate body language, voice modulation, presentation style and apart from these it also involves team coordination.

It can be observed that the above-mentioned tasks done in the classrooms are in line with Nunan's (1989; 2004) definition of a pedagogical task as "a piece of classroom work that involves the learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate".

Thanks to technological advancements teachers now have started using language laboratories to make the class more educative, pragmatic and thought provoking. With the introduction of language learning software, language teaching has resulted in a holistic approach i.e., the integration of the four methods of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) can be done with just one specific exercise. In the traditional teaching, a reading comprehension exercise usually involved only two skills. Reading and writing. However, with the introduction of language lab software teachers have gained a free hand in choosing material for the comprehension passage from anywhere around the world on any given topic. When students access this passage, they will be able to listen (L) to the passage and simultaneously read ® the passage for themselves as well. At times the software also allows the students to read (S) the passage and record his voice and play it once again with the pre-recorded voice to assess their pronunciation, accent, intonation and stress. The students then go ahead to do the exercises which are usually a mix of grammar based questions and opinion based questions, like say, what is their opinion on globalization and whether it has done any good to our country (assuming that the passage is on globalization). This forces the students to write (W) few sentences on the above two aspects. Thus it can be observed that although the exercise is referred to as comprehension passage, the software has given ample room for the teacher to take a holistic approach towards language teaching.

It can be concluded that social and economic changes brought about due to globalization have made English one of the most important languages to gain entry into and sustain oneself in the job market. This in turn, has given more importance to the role of the English teachers and has forced them to introduce innovative approaches, methods and techniques in the English classroom. Due to the various changes in market demands and technological advancements the teacher now has to update himself/herself and become well versed with technology and also link language learning within the contexts of the constantly changing sociological environment in order to arouse and sustain interest in the new generation. These approaches have in a way helped the students to gain confidence in application of grammar in real life scenario. Further as the contexts are contemporary based students tend to very easily identify themselves with them and are automatically motivated to participate. In a way content based instruction promotes a learner centric approach rather than teacher centric as students do not solely rely on the teacher for knowledge or information and the teacher invariably plays the role of the facilitator.

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