

Innovative Methods And Practices In Elt

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ABSTRACT

Conventional teaching methods for ELT are lecture-based and focus on rote learning rather than development of language competency. This paper tries to explore various innovative methods and techniques to make the learning process more exciting, and effective.

Key Words: Development of language, competency. Conventional, teaching methods.

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DRAWBACKS OF CONVENTIONAL TEACHING METHODS

In most of the class rooms in India, conventional teaching methods, materials and teaching techniques based on prescribed texts and syllabus are used uniformly despite vast heterogeneity in the nature of class rooms and the level of students¹. The conventional methods mainly depend on lecturing and rote learning and reduce English language learning to mere memorization and are of little use in developing language competency among the students. These methods make the learning process a dull and boring activity. Students are made mere passive partners rather than active participants in the learning process².

Therefore the necessity to deviate from the traditional methods and materials to use of innovative material and techniques of teaching has been strongly felt. By using novel teaching techniques like miming and dramatics, creating participating activities and using authentic materials such as songs, cartoons, advertisements, sports commentaries, episode from films, local folk literature, etc, the teachers can involve learners in the learning process by providing them direct experience and participation. By using authentic teaching material that is connected to the experiential and background knowledge of the students as well those available around him, an English class room can be made interactive, interesting, enthusiastic and learner friendly.

METHODS FOR MAKING ELT EFFECTIVE

The methods for teaching the English language can be made effective on any or all of the following lines:

- Technology based innovative teaching and learning strategies
- Using learners experiential knowledge for ELT
- Using innovative tasks for ELT
- Creating activities in the class room for initiating communication
- Use of innovative material like songs, cartoons, jokes, and anecdotes for ELT
- Use of social networking sites for learning English
- Project based ELT³
- Local and practical ways for ELT
- Creating indigenous pedagogic contents through class room situations⁴
- Creating indigenous themes to initiate discussion in a class room
- Involving students in different roles for ELT
- Teaching pronunciation through music⁵
- Using animated short stories in English language class room
- Using text book innovatively for initiating communication in a classroom
- Use of blended learning strategies in English language teaching and learning⁶
- Using quizzes, puzzles and riddles to create interest in a class room⁷
- Using debates, extempore, group discussions, and group work in a ELT class room
- ELT through bogging, E-mails and SMS⁸

Now, let us focus on some areas of innovative teaching methods for English language:

1. Online Teaching

Innovation is often inextricably linked with the internet and the current pandemic has made the use of digital platforms a *sine qua non*. Teaching through online class using the various applications has become a pre dominant and essential part of life during the current COVID 19 pandemic. All the online applications are user friendly and to an extent, easy to pply. Today almost everyone using social media, even though their occupations vary as also the purposes for which social media is used. Online classes save the trouble of commuting to schools. In an online class you can connect many people at the same time by just clicking a button. Flexibility, reduced costs, networking opportunities, ease of documentation and access to expertise are some of the major benefits. Cloud-based tools like Google Docs have also become indispensable. The option of uploading files as documents, or incorporating audios and videos in the class helps to make the classes more interesting and informative⁹.

2. Online Reference Materials

In linguistics, a corpus or text corpus is a language resource consisting of a large and structured set of texts. The use of large text collections used for studying linguistic structures, frequencies, etc. used to be the privilege of lexicographers. However, with most corpora now available online, and quite a few free of costs, teachers now have access to information about the way language is used in authentic texts and speech. Simple and easy-to-use references like Wikipedia, Google or Bing help students and the teachers to use the internet as their corpus.

3. Online Continuous Professional Development

For any teacher of English, there is always a need for continuous professional development – on different aspects of the language, new developments in teaching materials and methodologies, and exchange of ideas with other professionals in the same field elsewhere. In the olden days, this was addressed partially through reading of articles in journals, attending off-site training programs or phone calls with professional friends. The advent of the internet and the growth of social media have certainly allowed teachers of English from all over the world to form online communities that act like a huge global staffroom.

ELT blogging, for example, has opened up a network of people who can offer advice, support and ideas. Participants find it hugely advantageous to exchange ideas, and contacts and experiences

Special Apps

The development of mobile technology and the proliferation of smart phones have enabled many of us to access the internet and a huge variety of apps. Learners benefit from a variety of special apps and podcasts. Teachers are able to build on their teaching knowledge and skills by listening to podcasts or join a global community of teachers and watch webinars or archived videos of talks by TEFL (Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) teachers on EFL Talks. Tools like WhatsApp and Instagram help build channels of communication beyond the classroom. Students using their own devices have a record of the resources used to check back on after class.

2. Communicating in English With People Online

The ability to communicate online with people outside the classroom via Skype, Zoom, Google Meet and similar tools has enabled students to meet and interact with others in English. This could give the motivation to students who might not have the opportunity otherwise to interact with anyone in English.

3. Online Authentic Materials

One of the biggest benefits of the internet for language learners is the sudden wide-spread availability of authentic resources. This enables teachers to use content of interest to the students. Choosing the right online materials is crucial for efficient and effective learning. One of the major pitfalls of online resources is that there are a lot of unreliable materials online which can mislead students as well as teachers. Choosing the right materials has become a special skill and knowledge. Keynote by National Geographic Learning, makes use of TED talks to develop a pedagogically sound approach to language learning, while Language Learning with Digital Video (Cambridge University Press) looks at how teachers can use online documentaries and YouTube videos to create effective lessons.

4. Negotiated Syllabus

With the spread of internet, and explosion of quality information on all subjects and aspects, learning has evolved from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach. The teacher's role has become more as a consultant, guide, coach, and/or facilitator. Increasingly,

teachers involve students in decisions about what to do in the classroom. Teachers are realising the importance of conducting a needs analysis before tailoring a course. This is leading to a sort of negotiated syllabus.

5. Teaching Soft Skills and Critical Thinking Skills

There are many online resources that help teachers and students with soft skills like problem-solving, presentation skills, time management and decision-making. There are also resources which help children develop critical thinking skills that could support them not just in their English learning but in the development of life skills⁹.

OTHER INNOVATIVE IDEAS:

The critical task for any teacher is capturing the students' attention while the lesson is being taught and ensuring that whatever is taught remains with them long after they leave the classes. For this to happen, classroom experience should be redefined and innovative ideas that make teaching methods more effective should be implemented. The following are some innovative ideas that will help teachers reinvent their teaching methods and make their class interesting¹⁰.

1. Creative Teaching

Use different innovative tools like games or forms of visual exercises to excite their minds, stimulate creativity and capture the interest of the students. Use techniques to encourage different ideas and give the students freedom to explore.

2. Audio - Visual Tools

Incorporate audio-visual materials in teaching sessions. Supplement textbooks with models, filmstrips, movies and pictorial material. Use info graphics or other tools that will help their imagination develop and grow. There are a number of apps available for these. Even Microsoft Excel and Power Point have features to present data in very attractive and illustrative manner.

3. Learning through Practical Examples

Relating and demonstrating through real life objects and situations will kindle the students' interest and get them involved. Apart from giving such examples, ask the students to give their own examples which reflect different aspects of the study material.

4. Brainstorm

Brainstorming is a group creativity technique by which efforts are made to find a conclusion for a specific problem by gathering a list of ideas spontaneously contributed by its members. All the ideas are noted down without criticism and after the brainstorming session the ideas are evaluated¹¹. An innovative approach to teach English is to make time for brainstorming sessions into the classrooms. These sessions will be a great platform for students to voice their thoughts without having to worry about right or wrong. Set some ground rules before you start

5. Learning Beyond the Classroom

Physical classrooms have been kept on hold due to the pandemic now, and much has been written about the merits of classroom interactions. However, even when educational institutions are made free of such restrictions, the learning opportunities outside the classrooms should be borne in mind. Organize field trips that are relevant to the lessons or just simply take students for a walk outside of the classroom. Make them talk or write about what they see and experience.

6. Role Play

Teaching through role plays is a good way to make students develop their interpersonal skills. This method helps to improve the communication skills and enhance the confidence levels of the students.

7. Puzzles and Games

Learning is fun where puzzles and games are part of education. Puzzles and games help students to think creatively and face challenges.

8. Start Student Clubs or Groups

Encourage formation of one or more Student Clubs or Groups. Teachers and students can work on interesting topics. It can act as a platform to share one's views and learn more from others.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps it is this ability to think and reflect that will enable us as teachers and learners to take

any innovation out there and make it work in our context for our students. After all, as a wise teacher said, 'It is never the tool, but the user that makes the difference.'

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