Looking Beyond Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

The role of teachers in present days is totally different compared to role of teachers and classrooms, in the past. In the past it was teacher centred classrooms. Teacher delivered the information and it was one way teaching while students played a passive role as listeners. Moreover learning was confined to four walls of a classroom. But today it is not so. Teachers have to become facilitators and be aware of their new role, responsibilities and challenges that this magical era of science and technology is posing at them. Teacher must go beyond knowledge transmission, look beyond textbooks and make learning multidimensional. It is very essential now for the teachers to be competent enough to face and tackle any kind of challenges posed in teaching and learning process.

The job of a teacher has become very challenging now a days. Teacher has to update use of new modes/tools of teaching and learning, they have to be more proficient, plan and design their teaching methods and prepare well to make their teaching more captivating and magnificent. This will bring success in their teaching whatever the media they use.

In view of the above, this paper attempts to find out the role of teachers, innovative, learner-centered approaches, communicative and task-based methods (discussions, role plays, presentations, debates) and technology-integrated approaches that go beyond textbook-based instruction (use of internet resources, multimedia, podcasts, videos) adopting new methods of teaching and learning especially in English language class-rooms at tertiary level.

Key Words: facilitator, digital tools, learner-centered, pedagogy, task-based

'Learning is unifying seemingly divergent ideas and data**' –Terry Heick**

Introduction

*"The best teachers will not give you something to drink, they will make you thirsty. They will not give you answers but will put you on a path to seek answers."-**Shiv Khera**. (Motivational Speaker)*

Shiv Khera, the Motivational speaker says "Motivation is like fire and we need to fuel it on day-to-day basis." In the same way Teachers with their innovative tools and methods can infuse their students with confidence, new ideas and thoughts along with language learning. It is also very important to recognize the tools or methods of teaching and link thoughts and actions to make the class an engaging one. It can't be achieved overnight, it needs regular plan, practice and motivation. The first statement by Shiv Khera clearly states that teacher as a facilitator ignite desire to learn, encouraging students to question, explore, and think independently. They guide them toward discovering knowledge on their own.

As a teacher of language, one has to have thoughts about the topic, the way the language used, cultural context and most important is about students as learners and how they learn. One should also have thoughts about oneself as a teacher and aware about what the teacher can do to help students to learn. This awareness will enable as teachers to examine why we do, what we do and think about doing things differently.

Media "Inform, amuse, startle, anger, entertain, thrill, but very seldom leave anyone untouched" (Biagi Shirley 1996).

Biagi highlights deep and diverse impact of media on everybody and emphasizes that no one can escape from its impact. So media can be used as a powerful tool in teaching languages. Innovative and new tools of teaching English or any other language include a coherent set of links between actions and thoughts. The actions are the tools and the thoughts are the principles in language teaching. Innovative tools in language teaching are effective when pedagogical theories are meaningfully linked (thoughts) to classroom practices (actions). Constructivist theory comes to the rescue for teachers to keep learners engaged through active knowledge construction. Assigning tasks, projects, and collaborative problem-solving, teachers can enable learners to internalize language through use rather than rote learning.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) another pedagogical theory which reinforces meaningful interaction and real-life communication. Few tasks like group discussion, role-plays, storytelling, picture description, class presentation and pair work dialogues using real-life situations, help to increase fluency and functional competence over mere grammatical accuracy. Learner-centered approaches certainly will help in making the classroom learning enjoyable. For instance, personalized speaking or writing tasks, reflective writing and language apps chosen by learners can be used. Under cultural context tasks like role plays based on cultural situations, celebration-based activities, cultural case studies (social norms, politeness strategies, body language) and other activities undoubtedly help to foster fluency and confidence of students. So which ever media is used in teaching language, teachers have to provide with conducive learning environment so that the students can learn any language easily.

Dr. Shyam Bhat, a psychiatrist says "Words are important tools of my profession. I have to be sensitive to the language used, the rhythm, resonance and cadence of the words that are spoken". Language teachers, like psychiatrists, work fundamentally with words, and Dr. Shyam Bhat's observation can be meaningfully applied to language teaching practice. Teachers must be sensitive to the language they use in the classroom, as words shape learners' understanding, emotions, and confidence. By choosing encouraging and inclusive language, teachers create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and promotes participation. Words can become an excellent tool for any language teacher for creating a favorable teaching-learning environment.

Words

Teachers can make use of multimedia learning, free digital tools and internet resources to engage students in vocabulary instruction and learning. The strategies are designed to support the teaching of words and word learning, promote students' strategic use of web-based vocabulary tools and increase students' volume of reading and incidental word learning. One such tool available on internet is *eVoc* strategy.

It is an electronic or technology-based strategy that teachers can use to develop students' vocabulary learning and interest in words. The term eVoc is used both to highlight the strategies which rely on digital tools and resources and to suggest the evoking of learning potential. Both are achieved when technology and media are part of the instruction.

With the help of internet, one more strategy can be introduced such as learn from visual displays of word relationships within text. **Wordle** is one such free Web application that allows to create a word cloud based on the frequency of words in a particular text. It can be used to stimulate students' thinking about the meaning, importance and relationship of words as they analyze, create and publish. Some other strategies can be used like: A digital vocabulary field trip, connect fun and learning with online vocabulary games, Use of media to express vocabulary knowledge etc.

Games

Teachers can make their language class-rooms very lively through chalking out some interesting games. Actually, games are an effective learning tool that adult English language learners can use to improve their fluency. There are so many- from board games to computer games, there's something for every kid-at-heart. Games on **Link sentences, smash words** and even for learning English grammar we can use unique and exciting learning methods. Teachers can use the play game method with lessons that expand vocabulary and improve listening and speaking skills of the students. Some websites like: **Speedy English Grammar Practice: Fun ESL Exercises, English Education** etc. can be used by teachers in the classrooms.

> "We live in a world where media are omnipresent…, playing records and listening to the radio… The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person living in a world of powerful images words and sound." (UNESCO 1982)

The statement stresses that we are surrounded and dominated by media. It's essential as well as a shared responsibility of family and schools in preparing young people to live thoughtfully and intelligently in a world of media. Teaching students to use media creatively and responsibly is essential as these media continuously shape their thinking, language, values, behavior and worldview. Therefore, language teaching, being an art, requires sustained practice and drill to help learners critically engage with and effectively express themselves through such media.

For learning any art it needs sustained "practice and drill". Like singing, dancing and swimming, the learning of language also needs a good deal of constant practice. We can make use of various tools and materials for designing the tasks to enhance listening and speaking skills of the students while teaching languages. Such exercises can be used very efficiently by the language teachers with the help of internet/media in the classroom. But one has to have a lot of preplanning and preparation in selecting the material and designing the tasks which lead to fruitful learning in the classroom.

Listening and Speaking Tasks:

To learn a new language, we must be able to listen well. First, we have to be good listeners. The more we improve our ability to listen, the more our ability to speak will improve. This is a distinctive part of learning a new language. It is related to how we learned our first language or our mother tongue. As a child, we were "being exposed" which means we did a lot of listening before we spoke complete words and sentences. We were being continuously exposed to the language and heard the language spoken around us.

By utilizing Technology teachers can create a conducive environment for students so that they can enthusiastically participate and learn. Using e-media teachers can make students to listen to storytelling, speeches, poetry reading, watching movies, listen to news in English language, have conversations in English etc. Such exercises can be planned and help the adult students to learn the language easily.

Only when a learner starts using the language in his communication, then he will learn the language. Through consistent practice learners can be confident and use the language fluently. So the teachers of English language should give ample opportunities where the students are exposed to the language - either it is listening and speaking or reading and writing and have fun while they learn. One such activity using **internet** is **TED Talks**. Teachers can make students to listen to **TED Talks;** these short speeches are available **online** for no charge. The talks cover about any subject you are interested in. Professionals in respective fields present interesting information in less than five minute snippets, and with TED-Ed, you can make your own listening lessons based on the talks. Adult students not only find the talks interesting, they will also get a chance of listening to real people using real life experiences. Some more tasks a teacher can design are: **Interviews and Role Plays with a Twist, Music for the Soul, Did you read what I read?** and of course **Telephone conversations** and **Voice messages** are truly a listening-speaking challenge for any English learner. The aforementioned listening-speaking activities will engage and entertain adult learners.

Reading and Writing Tasks:

"Those who have already discovered the joy of books, however, are hooked for life. And as others become aware of the vast array of books available, they too will find that unrivaled knowledge and pleasure await them between the covers of books" (Beckert Christine 1992)

Christine Beckert's statement emphasizes the transformative and lifelong impact of reading. Once individuals experience the joy of books, reading becomes a lasting habit rather than a temporary activity. Beckert highlights the need to encourage reading habits early and to make learners aware of diverse reading materials. People of all ages find information, enjoyment and some sort of satisfaction after reading some very good books. Teachers can create interest and encourage the students to read good books. They can advise students to go to library and read the books which are mentioned in the extended reading activity in their language texts. Once the students have the habit of reading, nothing can hinder them. Again there are many websites which facilitate readers by providing free download of books. One such website is **Project Gutenberg Free eBooks** and many more.

Sometimes students don't like writing in class, but they do quite a bit of writing in their daily lives, in the form of **Tweets and Facebook** updates. The teachers can create a twitter account and a simple site at sites.google.com for the class to start writing short messages in response to each other. Gradually teachers can assign them different roles to contribute to a short story or some creative writing. Even **Blog writing** can be encouraged. The above-mentioned activities/tasks will promote many budding writers. The students definitely love it as it is totally different experience and learning beyond their textbooks will enhance their creative and logical thinking.

We should also be aware of the fact that information is abundant and it comes through different sources. We teachers have to understand, how to explore the abundant information and make use of it with much effect and success in the classrooms where students spend much of their time.

Conclusion

The above discussed aspects may seem to be fascinating but we also have to look into the application of the aspects i.e. how media/innovative tools/scientific methods can help our students, in speaking fluently and how we can make a piece of learning material interesting. Motivate and encourage students to become proficient in LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing) skills through various activities.

To conclude the teaching-learning process depends on both the teachers as well as learners. Both the teacher and the learner must understand that the study of a language is a means to develop one's power of expression, thought process and knowledge and mastering stylistic elements of the language.

Teachers must also be aware of the students' proficiency in English and change teaching methods as per their need. Testing in various levels is also a must to know the progress of the students. A healthy manner should be used to correct if mistakes committed. More over patience & encouragement always boosts up the learning attitudes. Teachers must ensure a wide space for students to improve and give opportunities to express themselves. Thus, teaching and learning should be made fun rather than difficult by looking beyond text-books.

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