

Innovative Methods Of Tapping The Skills In Teaching English Language To Native And Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract

The uniqueness of the English language lies in its acceptability by people of diverse cultures and traditions across the globe. All countries are protected by their borders, but the spread of the English language has known no bounds. All those who know the language are relentlessly perfecting their command of it and those who do not, yearn to know it. With this unquenchable desire, the spread of the English language is always on the rise. With a reputation of being a pioneer in the media, in spreading information, in imparting knowledge, and in enabling communication between various countries of the world, its popularity is ever growing, as a result of which scholarly efforts are continuously being made in introducing innovative techniques in teaching English to native and non-native speakers. This paper explains how various methods can be employed by focusing on the four skills of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking and unfolds captivating methods to make the teaching and learning of English easy, interesting, and enjoyable to students across the world.

Key Words: Popularity, Methods, Spreading, Motivation, Skills.

Introduction

The legacy of the English language left behind by the colonial masters has amazed and attracted countless individuals with a desire to learn the language. This legacy has spread throughout the globe with the reputation of it being the language that has permeated all political boundaries and communities the most. Although any language is the medium of expression, English language is specifically so as the expressions made in it are conveyed the world over as a link between countries and civilizations. Hence, the number of students enrolling in the English learning classes over the decades, the world over, has always been on the rise.

The Role of a Teacher

The primary role of a teacher always has been, and always will be, to disseminate information. A teacher guides one from the dark shadows of ignorance to the storehouse of knowledge. His basic task is to impart knowledge, and his main concern is to make students learn systematically. When teachers embark upon teaching English, it is of prime importance that they make their delivery easy, interesting and enjoyable to students. This paper unfolds a skilful method of teaching English, involving the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Motivation is the bedrock of successful learning. Students generate interest in learning through motivation. It is the responsibility of the teacher to device methods of motivating his students. Once the students are motivated, learning becomes easy and the recipients of the knowledge imparted are eager to learn and the teaching and learning process moves on at a steady pace. Students are expected to listen attentively to their teachers, not only when they teach but when they give instructions as well, in order to make progress in the learning process.

The Skills

i. Listening

The skill of listening is gradually developed through practice. As in the Anglo-Saxon era, Scops composed epic poems like Beowulf, Widsith, Gilgamesh, etc., long before the advent of printing and recited them to an audience that comprised a community that could neither read nor write as literacy then, between 600 and 1100 A.D, was at a very low level with just one per cent of the population in England knowing how to read and write, and this privilege was restricted to the clergy and the aristocracy alone. The audience, by virtue of their inability to read or write, were compensated with a keen

power to listen. And listening they did; patiently and attentively to everything that was recited regularly and spread over long periods of time. An oral culture wherein individuals trained themselves from childhood, not in reading or writing, but in listening to the “spoken” word with keen concentration, comprehension and delight, was the order of the day.

The matter contained in the recitation of these epic poems was usually a recounting or a narration of the heroic deeds and gallantry of legendary heroes, depicting the culture and environment within which they existed. These glorious stories of their forefathers made the audience swell with pride and exultation and the awareness of the fact that if they did not listen, the matter would be lost to them forever, led them to develop and sharpen their skill of listening which entailed having a highly retentive memory.

In order to make students listen attentively, it is of prime importance that you capture their attention through your speech. The teacher should be able to spellbind his students with the power, beauty and dramatic impact of his rendition. This will sharpen the listening skill of the students. To do this, it is inevitable that your speech is interesting. Stories, incidents, and anecdotes chosen by the teacher to be read out to his students will determine the teacher's awareness of the aptitude of his students. The compelling interest of the story should capture the interest of the listeners so much so that they are absorbed in it. The situations and events in the story should be captivating. In such a situation, listening is at its best, ensuing in an easy and steady flow of comprehension. The more absorbed the student is in what he is listening to, the more retentive will it be in his memory. Attentive listening to the guidance given by the teacher is bound to place the students on the threshold of success, as has been most aptly stated:

It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the
privilege of wisdom to listen.

Oliver Wendell Holmes (2003, p 130)

ii. Writing

The students should then be given exercises in writing, based on the story, such as:

- 1). Giving short and snappy answers to questions.
- 2). Marking selected statements as true or false.
- 3). Making sentences of their own with selected words.
- 4). Giving synonyms and antonyms for selected words.

- 5). Summarising the story.
- 6). Giving Character sketches.

iii. Reading, speaking and Comprehension

With every successive exercise of reading aloud to students, followed by exercises in writing, the level of comprehension displayed by students will be found, through the evaluation process, to be on the rise, gradually improving upon the two skills of listening and writing. “Nature has given us one tongue but two ears,” wrote the Greek philosopher Epictetus, “that we may hear twice as much as we speak.” (1994, p. 52)

Students should then be given the text which they would take turns in reading aloud while the rest of the class listens attentively. In other words, each student takes his turn of being a teacher. After the reading process, the student-teacher should be made to explain the story in his own words, followed by questions based on the incidents recorded in the story, which the students would answer. The students should be taught to question the incidents narrated in the story and to give their opinions as to what would have happened in a different situation. With this, their creative abilities would be tapped alongside learning the language by motivating them to critically view and evaluate what they are learning. Consistency in this method of teaching will enhance their skills of reading and speaking.

Accuracy and Economy of Language

Accuracy means using words which convey exactly what you mean while economy means frugal and prudent use of language. Accurate and economic use of language in speaking and writing are important factors in communication. Students should be given intensive training in how to express their ideas or what they wish to communicate by choosing the appropriate words implying accuracy of language and to avoid unnecessary details, implying economy of language.

The ability of a student to express his thoughts clearly in as few words as possible will display his style and his communication bears a mark of sophistication. To begin with, the teacher has to go down to the level of his students, be one with them and then raise them slowly and gradually to the tenets of language and learning, through the various standards set forth in the process and eventually to a high level of proficiency. The Irish poet and

playwright, William Butler Yeats, once said, 'Think like a wise man, but communicate in the language of the people.' If you adhere to the rules of accuracy and economy in choosing your language, you are sure to accomplish with your spoken words, the essence of what Yeats is saying. A cursory glance at the exercise given below will give you an insight into the discipline observed in adhering to accurate and economic choice of language.

Original Statement:

If you want to write good essays you must acquire a love of reading—not simply reading stories for amusement, but reading good books of history, travel, biography, and science. Fill your mind with fine thoughts and accurate information. By so doing, you will become 'a full man', and "a full man" can always find plenty to say on most subjects. (Wren & Martin, p. 624)

Shortened Statement

Students should be encouraged to read beyond their syllabus. Reading gives you a wide range of knowledge. By reading books on different subjects, you will gain information and become "a full man" with a command on various subjects. It also forms the basis of good grammar.

Students should be trained in correct usage of grammar. This may be perfected through exercises such as:

- 1). Filling in the blanks with suitable prepositions.
- 2). Replacing erroneous articles with correct ones in a set of sentences.
- 3). Correcting sentences with grammatical errors.
- 4). Adorning a passage with punctuation marks and using capital letters where required.

A popular story narrating the conclusion of former President of the United States, John F. Kennedy's well celebrated speech at the Berlin Wall in 1963, tells us how Kennedy wished to say, "Ich bin Berliner!"---meaning, "I am a Berliner!" However, what he said was, "Ich bin *ein* Berliner!" In German, words for nationalities are not preceded by articles (*ein* is an article meaning 'a' or 'an'). It so happens that *Berliner* is also the name of a pastry. Thus, what Kennedy actually told the Germans was, "I am a jelly doughnut!" Even the best communicators can make mistakes if they are not careful.

Students may take interest in adorning passages such as the one given below:

Crude Passage

mr brown is a retired scholar with a love for gardening he is 70 years old and spends his time either reading or gardening he is seen daily in his garden in the evenings tending and caring for the plants, flowers and foliage he mows the lawn and waters the plants as well he is in possession of various gardening tools such as rake hoe spade and shovel this hobby of his serves as an exercise and keeps him fit and healthy and is envied by his neighbours mr johnson and miss matilda living on either side of his house and is often referred to as the strong man alas is it not surprising for a man of his age

Adorned passage

Mr. Brown is a retired scholar with a love for gardening. He is seventy years old and spends his time either reading or gardening. He is seen daily in his garden in the evenings, tending and caring for the plants, flowers and foliage. He mows the lawn and waters the plants as well. He is in possession of various gardening tools such as rake, hoe, spade, and shovel. This hobby of his serves as an exercise and keeps him fit and healthy and he is envied by his neighbours, Mr. Jonson and Miss Matilda, living on either side of his house and is often referred to as “the strong man”. Alas! is it not surprising for a man of his age?

Translation

In translation exercises, students should be taught to translate passages from their mother tongue into English. They should be made aware of the challenging factor of comprehending the written word and reproducing the content in English without changing the meaning.

Translation problems are quite common. Someone at the United Nations once entered a common English saying into a translating computer. The machine was asked to translate into Russian and then back into English the saying, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The result was, “The wine is good but the meat is spoiled.”

When Pepsi-Cola invaded the Chinese market, the product's slogan, “Come alive with the Pepsi generation,” was translated as “Pepsi brings back your dead ancestors!” Language details like these can make the difference between saying exactly what you mean and missing the mark. *Source: Richard Lederer, Anguished English.*

Activity Based Learning

Teaching should be activity-based. Motivating factors and incentives should be introduced as they will arouse the anxiety of students to put in their best. Enactments, essay writing and debate competitions, film shows and listening to news can be made the prime activities in the 'learning through entertainment' process.

To have the students dramatise the stories read in class is a method that provides language acquisition through entertainment. Students can be grouped and each group enacts a story from the ones that have been taught. Since this calls for regular practice before the final enactment, all the incidents, situations, and characters in the story find an everlasting place in their memory. Here, their skill of speaking is exhibited and subjected to grammatical corrections and guidance in tone and accent by the teacher who observes the enactment with concentration. This method, however, should be accompanied by incentives, based on the scores obtained by each group.

In Dumb Sharads, students learn to formulate sentences to suit the actions in the enactment, which collectively make up a story. The vocabulary of the students is enhanced; their imagination is set free to knit together a series of visual events, bringing them to a logical conclusion. This varied form of learning through entertainment disciplines the students' organizational capacity.

In the next two activities, namely, essay writing and debate competitions, students ponder upon ideas, groom them with wisdom, and present them in their own style. The skill of writing that they have acquired will be displayed in the first activity, while their skill of speaking will be presented in the second. Both these activities should display accurate and economic use of language.

In the last two activities, which are film shows and news, the students' ability to listen and comprehend the spoken word is activated and at the same time, enhances their vocabulary. Here, their skill of listening is tested. The accurate and economic use of language they come across in these two activities will be employed by them in the previous two activities of essay writing and debate competitions. In order to write essays and prepare for debates, students have to do a lot of reading thereby improving upon their skill of reading.

The same activities can be carried out for students of different age groups but the content should differ in order to parry with the intellectual and maturational range of the students.

This method entails in the desired results of students steadily acquiring fluency in speaking, proficiency in reading, comprehending the spoken word and accuracy in writing. Since all the four skills contribute to the learning of English, they are considered to be the contributory strands in the fabric of English, which demands the consistent attention of both teachers and students to easy and effective language learning. Therefore, striking compatibility between the four skills should be the basic armoury of a teacher in teaching English to both native and foreign students.

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