



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>
Journal DOI: [10.21474/IJAR01](https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01)

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A PAPER ON ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES.

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 14 April 2016
 Final Accepted: 19 May 2016
 Published Online: June 2016.

Key words:

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Abstract

Civilization is the miracle of human thought. Language is the vehicle of thought. Language transports ideas across boundaries- geographical, political, social and cultural. English has come to occupy the status of the lingua franca of the world. Globalization today has necessitated increased efforts to gain conversance in English. It is only a century and half ago that English education came to be introduced in India. The preferred medium of instruction in the Indian subcontinent is English. Majority of the professional courses are invariably studied in English owing to the fact that expert study material in pure sciences, engineering, medicine, astronomy, management and many other subjects are available in English. With the vision of preparing our youngsters use these resources with considerable ease, it becomes inevitable for us to teach English in the most receptive ways. English being a foreign language, if taught with the native environment and contexts in view, learning becomes natural, easy, effort less and eventually, we would inculcate love for this target language which will help youngsters excel in their passionate subjects of study. Thus, innovating teaching techniques of English language based on the group in hand would for us mean devising, designing and executing language learning techniques that have an Indian touch, and are derived from the known to the unknown. This paper states alternative pedagogies to cater to students with varying degrees of proficiency in English language skills. Experiences of trying alternative pedagogies in teaching English for B.Tech. students have been elaborated in the paper. The overwhelming positive transformation that becomes evident by the end of each course motivates us to carry forward our efforts to innovate.

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Introduction:-

The principal views of language learning focusing on the structural and functional approaches have undoubtedly initiated efforts to learn and teach English language in the Indian sub continent. It's very natural to see evolving approaches to language learning wanting to cater to changing socio cultural contexts.

Change from stereotype is welcome. Grasping and retaining a new idea is easier when it is embedded in a practical, novel and unconventional method.

English language teaching in the Indian subcontinent is truly challenging, demanding and requires immense involvement and initiatives by English language teachers at all levels.

A sincere effort has been made by the team to satisfy the ultimate interests of students in their quest for knowledge, for attaining competence to finally derive the cherished benefit.

The following pedagogies are strongly recommended to teach English at the undergraduate level. The strength of the groups that are made to go through these pedagogies is 25- 30. Supporting evidences of positive learning experiences highly advocate the use of the same. The subject being really vast, this paper encompasses the essential aspects of the pedagogies adopted in the four essential skills of language learning- speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Speaking:-

The most effective tool of language is speech. An English teacher's prime objective is to enable a learner to learn to speak the language with ease, confidence and passion. However, in the Indian scenario, English being predominantly the second language of study, it's for us the English language teaching fraternity to analyze the language ability of the students in hand and then devise and execute techniques to create a congenial speaking environment where fluency and perfection are achieved.

"Don't let mental blocks control you. Set yourself free. Confront your fear and turn the mental blocks into building blocks." Roopleen (words to inspire the winner in YOU)

Short speeches:-

The objective is to create willingness to speak which will naturally involve the expression of one's knowledge and ideas. The tutor focuses on drawing the students to actively speak for at least three minutes before an audience which is a peer group. The student is free to choose a topic of his or her interest so that a comfort zone is established. This facilitates individuals with fear or nervousness also to evince interest in the task. Anticipating a few passive members, the teacher introduces a few pictures or videos in order to draw them to participate. In a situation where a student goes blank about even choosing a topic the teacher helps him to start speaking about himself, his school, his hobbies his memorable experiences etc.

Proficiency in speaking is evaluated on the following criteria:-

Verbal	Non verbal
Use of vocabulary	Body language (facial expression, eye contact, gestures, postures)
Grammar	Paralinguistic features (pitch, pace, tone, articulation)
Sequence of content (introduction, development, conclusion)	

Analysis of the outcome of this activity in a majority of groups:-

Proficiency	Initial	Subsequent
Excellent	10%	25%
Good	20%	40%
Satisfactory	20%	35%
Needing Attention	50%	

Group Discussion:-

Exchange of ideas among participants ensures an effort to express, elaborate, argue, analyze and debate, thereby resulting in extensive speaking in the target language. Besides facilitating team work, individuals are self motivated to do their best; a healthy competition to excel within the group greatly enhances speaking skills.

This innovative pedagogy involves careful steps so as to bring in maximum participation in speaking. Students are put in groups of five to six. Students with different levels of speaking skills are brought together so as to have heterogeneous teams. Here, those with good skills tend to motivate the rest to come up with a successful GD. Topics given for discussion range from social, political, economic, geographic, sports, entertainment and so no. Selection of such a wide range of topics drives the students to make efforts to read, browse or look for apt information from sources like books, journals, magazines, electronic media etc.

The strategy is that the teacher dons the role of moderator, facilitating lively, continuous discussion. The activity improves the speaking skills of not only the group but also of the audience who critically examine the deliberations

of the discussion. A question answer session or an open house discussion towards the end makes the pedagogy truly effective.

The moderator gives a feedback on the following criteria: content, flow, team work, coordination, appreciation for others' ideas and conviction of thought and speech.

Role plays:-

One of the ways of teaching a foreign language is role plays, where students assume to play a role which they do not otherwise play in real life.

Role plays are active donning of characters in different scenarios. Individuals step into the shoes of people in various contexts. The objective of the task is to bring together students for team work which involves ample interaction, communicating in contexts with specific vocabulary needs and all paralinguistic features of communication. The suggested and practised pedagogy encompasses these salient features.

- ❖ Students are given the choice to identify socially relevant situations which will interest the group.
- ❖ Care is taken to have a combination of active and silent types of participants.
- ❖ When students are unable to come up with situations, the moderator suggests topics like different life situations which will undoubtedly create interest.

Once the topic is finalized, the next step would be to develop on the content where the students' language proficiency needs to be taken care of. If the students find it difficult to articulate high sounding words, use of simpler language can be suggested. This would enable students to be comfortable with the stage, and at the same time would help play their roles with confidence.

Every role play is witnessed by the whole group, thus inviting appreciation and criticism, leading to exchange of ideas- verbal, non verbal and ideological.

Feedback is given to students based on speaking and enacting, connecting to the emotions and ideals of the roles; congruity of verbal and nonverbal cues and choice of appropriate vocabulary for chosen contexts.

Criteria	Initial	Subsequent
Level of confidence	40%	65%
Appropriateness of vocabulary	50%	70%
Willingness to interact and coordinate	30%	90%

Listening:-

Listening occupies an important part in communication. It is a process by which we make sense of what we listen to, and comprehend better. To be an effective communicator one needs to be a good listener too.

To help students improve their listening abilities, the use of audio mode is very effective. A few recordings are played to a class of 25 students. If the accent is difficult to follow, the recordings are played a couple of times. Then the students are asked to summarize the audio recordings that they have listened to. The goal of such listening skills is to confirm that the students pay attention to what he has heard. This kind of activity helps in thinking, reasoning and reflecting, which help the students to reproduce the information in their own words.

To help students make notes better, a short situational recording is played and students take notes on what they listen to in the conversation. For example playing an audio recording which has details of arranging a schedule for a meeting, or booking a ticket for a conference, or handling a complaint requires an ear for specific details. The recordings played for comprehension include different accents- Indian, American, British, Australian and European. Exposure to these varieties prepares our students to understand the nuances of cultural difference in use of English, thus helping them to communicate better in the global scenario.

Audio visual tools by way of playing documentaries, short films, movies and specially made presentations on various soft skills enhance listening.

Around 70% of our students found that such activities helped them follow the teacher better and were also happy that they could multi task- listening and writing.

Writing:-

Writing is another predominant tool in the process of learning a language. It helps students in thinking, analyzing and organizing the thought process which would help them convey the content in an appropriate way. When a student is capable of articulating the thoughts in an appropriate method it would help them contribute to their area of studies and further in their desired profession. An English teacher's role is to put in an effort to improve and enhance writing skills on a regular basis.

Creative writing:-

The traditional system of teaching English as a second language in India has been focusing on rote learning. Having realized the futility of rote learning our alternative pedagogies in strengthening this basic skill of language have proved encouraging and highly successful.

In addition to improving basic writing like letters, comprehension and essays, our main strategy is to enable students to express their unique thoughts in the most meaningful and expressive styles.

Creative writing goes beyond the norms of formal writing. Wiity and LaBrant say, Creative writing is a composition of any type of writing at any time primarily in the service of such needs

- ❖ The need for keeping records of significant experience
- ❖ The need for sharing experiences with an interested group
- ❖ The need for free individual expression which contributes to mental and physical health.

This pedagogy is taken forward with appropriate inclusions in methodology to involve greater number of students into this unconventional technique of language learning.

The pedagogy includes the following:-

A few images are displayed on a screen, eliciting a piece of writing- description or even a poem. This method provides students freedom to express their thoughts, most of which turn out to be interesting, unique and thought provoking. This technique creates wonders in expression that can enrich the stock of literature with us. Further the ability to create pieces of writing motivates students to read and write better.

The facilitator takes stock of the students' work focusing mainly on inclination for creativity, tone and style, and vocabulary.

Many a time, the students would be looking into this activity for the first time even after twelve years of study with English as medium of instruction. Hence to create an easy approach to pool in creative talent for thought and writing, it is suggested to make it a group activity which is termed as collaborative approach. This is an experiments drawing inspiration from Tim Richardson's article on the benefits of collaborative approach. It is a great way to explore and learn a language.

The pedagogy is as follows:-

The instructor forms groups of heterogeneous nature. A topic is stated on which each group is asked to write either a description or a poem. The students' aesthetic sense, sense of appreciation an eye for details and the want to pen words to bring out their stretch of imagination is brought out. For example, this is a short writing that was done instantly by one of the students

The Power of your Eyes:-

- ❖ A black marvel in a white moon
- ❖ That's what all behold
- ❖ But the whole world in a deep sea
- ❖ That's the power of your eyes.
- ❖ A sharp glazing reflection of their own
- ❖ That's what all behold
- ❖ But a spark of zeal and zest

- ❖ That's the power of your eyes
- ❖ (The above lines are from a student's instant writing in the classroom)
- ❖ This method works wonders since the talent, ideas, and words of all individuals blend to create an admirable piece of writing.

Reading:-

The traditional approach of English language classes has a model loud reading by the teacher followed by silent reading by pupils, and then the usual comprehension exercises. This limits the students answering questions pertaining to the given text. The drawback here is that many students do not actively participate in the task of reading because the practice of rote learning has got deep rooted in our system.

The objective of the English teacher with respect to inculcating reading habits in students requires many innovative techniques to interest the youngsters.

Alternative pedagogies to hone reading skills prove worthwhile.

- ❖ The teacher begins every class with sharing of news and happenings reported in newspapers and magazines. With the zeal to contribute to discussion, students read newspapers and magazines on a regular basis. This practice undoubtedly increases word power and fluency.
- ❖ Library work on a regular basis increases the students' horizon of thought and transforms them to be well informed citizens.
- ❖ Book review is an exercise given to the students. Students select books from various genres, read them and prepare to write a review in a prescribed format. Reading here is with the purpose of critically examining the theme, the plot, the characters, the style and finally the message. Thus, focused reading happens.

Conclusion:-

Alternative pedagogies in English language teaching are so many that they just evolve in the environment of the teacher and the taught. The abilities and the talents of the learners are of myriad kinds that no particular pedagogy can be prescribed for teaching. However, the techniques that are stated in this paper seem to be universally apt for the Indian environment. Whatever has been stated is evidence of a considerable degree of acquisition of language skills by the groups that have been the beneficiaries.

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