

**INNOVATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AT THE  
UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN A RURAL SETUP**

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The field of language education is changing at an ever-increasing rate. Traditional notions of education are giving way to newer, more innovative ways of thinking about how we learn, teach and acquire knowledge. In *How Languages are Learned*, Patsy M Lightbown and Nina Spada state that all second language learners have exposure to language learning as they have already acquired at least one language. However, the learning conditions, differ according to their age groups. The young learners are 'allowed to be silent until they are ready to speak' (38) and are given practise in their second language through songs and so on, the older learners receive far less exposure to the language, limited to a few hours a week, in addition, they are also not exposed to all kinds of discourse types in the classroom. Jeremy Harmer states that children learn languages instinctively based on the exposure they receive to the language.

The teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) has employed diverse methodologies, reflecting successive theories of language acquisition. Approaches of historical significance include pure grammar and translation of texts, audio-visual teaching, and situational techniques. The more recent language acquisition methodologies are the communicative approach, the natural approach, the total physical response, and community learning. Each of these approaches has its strengths and weaknesses, and has been popular at various times. Some approaches tend to concentrate on the context in which language learning takes place, while others emphasize the importance of classroom atmosphere and the students' frame of mind. The more traditional approaches seem to focus on defining language learning in terms of the structure and concentrate principally on the mechanics of the language as delivered by the teacher-driven classroom management style. On the other hand, modern emphasis on the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language is on individual learning styles and communication-based teaching and learning paradigms. A

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major impact of these developments is a shift of attention from contrived, memory-driven pseudo communication of grammar and linguistic form to the context of actual, authentic communication with total personal involvement in the process of learning.

Teaching English in a rural college in Coastal Karnataka, I have generally seen that students want to learn English but there is a lot of diffidence in starting the arduous task of actually speaking in English. This is especially so because students do not otherwise converse in English and fear being laughed at if they speak in broken English. Another impediment to learning English is the fact that students are permitted to answer all their papers except English, in the vernacular language. Since passing examinations is the first priority of students, most of them attempt all other papers in the vernacular languages over which they have greater proficiency. In such a scenario, as a teacher of English, I realised that making my students speak in English cannot be done in a classroom situation; neither can it be done in a 'spoken English class', because they were shy to attend them. I now had to devise some method to develop in them the hunger and the urgency for learning words and slowly sentences.

My objectives were to

1. Build confidence in my students that they *can* speak in English.
2. Motivate them to treat English as a communication tool not as an end product.
3. To show them that English is fun.
4. Not to focus on the quantum of words, phrases and sentences to be mastered but to give them an experience of a wide range of English language in a non-threatening environment and keep corrections to the minimum.

The method that I used had to be activity based, with emphasis on fluency and not correctness. Moreover, it had to be group work which would require use of words and sentences for communication among members of the group. The first activity I took up was a game called 'Tom, Dick or Harry'. This is a group game. Each team has 3 members. One of the members of the team would be given a card which would have the name of a famous personality. The other two members of the group would have to find out the name of the personality by asking questions, the questions had to be 'yes/no' kind because the person answering could only answer in 'yes' or 'no'. Initially, students spoke in broken sentences, sometimes only in words. However, as the game progressed, and the spirit of competition

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was felt, they forgot that they were actually using English words and started asking me for translations from Kannada, which is the state language to English and by the end of four rounds they had used quite a few words and sentences in English. There were ten teams from various classes. The newness of the activity attracted a huge audience. I also had some audience questions. Soon, they began asking for more games. I conducted Dumb Charades, Tongue-twisters, Group Discussion and gradually story building exercises. I must mention here that the number of students participating kept increasing as the competitions progressed and as the years went by. These games were looked on as fun and not ‘learning’ of English, nevertheless my desire of making them comfortable with the English Language was slowly taking shape.

Gradually, I noticed in my students a desire to converse amongst themselves in English. The only hindrance now was their poor vocabulary. By now I had succeeded in gaining their confidence so they came to me for help. I gave them a simple solution, to gather all words and sentences that they normally speak and write them down. I then gave them their equivalents in English showing them how sentence structure varies between English and Kannada and how all words did not have English equivalents. I was now telling them about sentence structure and framing right sentences but in a very informal way and this learning was not connected to classroom teaching. Students had many questions to ask and with time started gaining the confidence to speak in the classroom on small topics of their choice for two minutes. This exercise continues and I can now confidently state that this method of learning outside the classroom in a non-threatening, collective and informal way not only helps students to shed inhibitions but also makes such learning last a lifetime. My old students now call me up and speak to me only in English and when they do so it is really very difficult to recall and believe that these students very once diffident to even attend spoken English classes.

In Conclusion, I would like to say that acquisition of English can be a stressful exercise for a student at the initial stage. However, a teacher can make a difference by giving the student an opportunity in the form of some enjoyable language games that can teach more than any textbook can ever achieve. Moreover, such learning helps the student in better understanding

of the text, gives greater confidence as speakers and in the long run contributes to success in life.

#### References

Harmer, Jeremy. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Longman, 2007.

Lightbown, Patsy M and Nina Spada. *How Languages are learned*. Oxford University Press, 2013.