

Teaching-Learning methods of the English Component in IGNOU's Postgraduate Certificate in the Professional Development of Teachers

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The policies of schools in India lay emphasis on a one year pre-service programme e.g. (B.Ed) as the only training programme that is made mandatory for teachers that is believed to fully equip them with knowledge and skill that they have to apply in their entire teaching career.

Other subject-based intervention programmes that are conducted by the government and private institutions are of short duration (one day to one month). In the case of English they concentrate on monolingual Anglo centric assumptions and does not provide an indigenous model that would truly integrate it with plurilingual and pluricultural community in which it would function.

Most teacher-training programmes do not include learner factors in second language acquisition in India. There is a well researched area (see Agnihotri et al. 1998 for State of Art in this area) where it says that affective factors such as motivation, intelligence, aptitude as well as sociolinguistic factors such as parental background, medium of instruction in schools, gender and age help a learner acquire second language. The major pitfalls of teacher training programmes is that they do not have any research based understanding of the learner. The grammar taught to learners is sentence based without including the discourse perspective.

A lot of research carried out (see Carter and Nunan 2001 for State of Art on different aspects of ELT) shows that if we take the case of teaching 'methodology' the easiest way they seem to follow is the linear approach starting from grammar-translation method and ending in the communicative language teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 2000) giving little attention to post- communicative language teaching.

One of the few training programmes on Teaching of English that deals with innovative teaching-learning methods that is neglected otherwise is the Postgraduate Certificate in the Professional Development of Teachers (PGCPDT) (6 credit course) launched by Indira Gandhi National Open University in 2004. This programme was started to address the educational needs of the unreached teachers of Navodaya Vidyalaya located in the rural areas where there are no such educational programmes conducted for them. The course provides subject-based training including English.

The **main objective** of this paper- What are the various tools used in the course to provide innovative teaching-learning methods in the classroom.

Pair work and Group work

In an Indian situation the classroom consists of 40+ students. Since only two students are involved, it is not easy for either of them to switch off. The formation of pairs can either be in fixed pair where a student can work with his partner on his left or right or flexible pairs in which the student can interact with not only B but C and D also.

Pair work gives students an opportunity to use language and helps them gain confidence. The teacher moves around monitoring pair work and assisting wherever required.

Group work: Groups of 4 to 6 is formed and a relevant task to given to them. Group should be large enough where everyone participates while one student can do the reporting another can be the leader.

The teacher also provides guidance when asked to listen to group discussions but as far as possible does not to intervene. Each student is given turns to become a group leader. The mistakes can be noted and discussed in the next class. In pair/group work gives lot of opportunity to students to speak English.

Teacher's role as organizer – She should be a good organizer where students should know what they are expected to do.

Teacher as prompter – The teacher should motivate the students by making a few suggestions in order to set the ball rolling.

Teacher as resource or consultant- the teacher can move from group to group to offer assistance. She does not intervene and but only offers help.

Teacher as co-communicator or fellow participant can present new ideas informally and build a better rapport with the students.

Action Research

Another important role of the teacher is to monitor her teaching herself and develop strategies to improve her teaching.

The teacher may find out about the difficulties faced by the learners and outline a specific course of action or **planning**.

The following tools can be used at the action stage:

The teacher can go through the **lesson report** that describes what happened during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of the lesson and how effective the lesson was.

The teacher can carry out a **survey** or administer a **questionnaire**. She can ask the students to indicate how useful they find groups work activities.

A lesson can be **recorded** in an audio or video CD to clear picture of the classroom situation.

Another teacher would **observe** while the teacher teaches in order to get different aspects of teaching.

Then comes the **action stage** with all the observations made and data collected they are observed again.

Reflection: Once the results are obtained and conclusions drawn the teacher knows where she has gone wrong and she initiates changes in her teaching strategy.

Using Multilingualism as a classroom resource

Using the multilingualism approach will ensure that students do not forget their own linguistic identity in the process of learning English .It will help them to analyze language and see how it works. They will also have exposure to multiple languages. The level of participation and involvement of students increase if they are asked to share language data of their mother tongue. The role of the teacher will be that of facilitator and a learner.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Much of the writing in schools happens in other subject areas. It is therefore important to expose the children to writing tasks from various subject areas so that from the beginning they are trained for later writing tasks in school and real life. While writing mathematics problem, or the flow chart of geography or a report based on diagrammatic or tabular information it requires the ability to present ideas logically to choose appropriate style and form accurately.

The goal of this kind of approach can help the teacher realize the advantages of cooperation in lesson planning.

- a) The class teacher can organize team teaching that involves the teachers of other subjects.
- b) Different school subject can be linked.
- c) Material will be produced which will stimulate the interest of students to work on projects.
- d) Actively involve students in the educational process.
- e) Linguistically a lot of reading, speaking – listening and writing takes place. The language teacher will in the pre-learning activities present any new linguistic items eg. Vocabulary, grammar which would be required for doing the project.
- f) It will be important for students to be a self-motivated and self-directed learner.

Reading

Extensive reading plays a significant part in the process of second language learning for various reasons. This activity can be carried out outside the classroom by the students themselves. It provides valuable reinforcement of language already presented in the classroom giving students useful practice in skills especially inferring meaning from the context when structures and vocabulary are not familiar. Moreover it may be the only way in which the student can keep in touch with English after s/he has completed the course.

For intensive reading we should choose material that is not only interesting and appealing to students and it should be exploitable, the students should be able to interact on their own, without too much mediation by the teacher.

Developing Writing Skills

For the writing process to develop naturally it is important to allow some mother tongue usage till child has enough mastery over the second language to not require the mother tongue. This can be done by providing a secure and stimulating natural environment for language learning.

The teachers have to build the writing programme around the child's needs. The learners should be given an environment free from worry of making mistakes while writing. The teacher should be able to understand that the children's progress at different paces is influenced by his/her background. Children should gradually be brought to the arena of the writing of second language by being allowed to use their mother tongue in the beginning. The teacher needs to recognize the importance of having audience respond as feedback to what the child has written.

Teacher can help in writing:

- by talking explicitly about the stages of writing a composition etc.
- by supporting in the early stages of the writing process to get the ideas together.
- by providing good models for writing indirectly by encouraging good reading habits or directly by analyzing textual structure.
- by encouraging in drafting process by creating a workshop kind of atmosphere in their classrooms. They can intervene quietly, questioning and advising in order to help students get their ideas down on paper in English. They can encourage students to read each other's work suggesting restructurings and revisions.

Teaching Grammar

- Grammar is taught for communication not for grammar's own sake.
- Grammar should be taught, as discourse not isolated sentences.
- Grammar should be taught in context.

- Make grammar learning fun.
- Focus on fluency first and accuracy later.

Advantages of Grammar Games

Grammar games motivates learners, makes them actively involved and the spirit of competition makes them participate enthusiastically.

- Language is best learnt when focus is not on language, but on meaning.
- Games help teachers to create contexts in which language is useful and meaningful.
- The quality of the practice promoted by these games is much richer than the amount or quantity of practice promoted by traditional grammar exercises.
- Games also provide a diagnostic role: while students play the games, the teacher could quietly observe the students' performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. This feedback is very valuable to the teacher for further planning of his/her teaching.

Speaking Skills

The learner needs to be able to acquire the skill of using both conversation (face-to-face or telephonic) and extended talk comprising descriptions and narrations, which are a part of linguistic discourse.

Interactive and non-interactive uses of language:

Interactive use of language is when two or more participants take turns to speak. It needs constant processing of ideas and language in the mind of the speakers as they respond to each other.

Non-interactive use of language is less interactive than conversation such as public speaking. Sometimes it is not interactive at all. For example a speech is generally prepared and written down before it is read out to the audience.

Other techniques to teach oral skills are:

- The conversation class or the question and answer sessions
- The topic based discussion class
- Task centered fluency practice
(These activities are done in small groups by learners and may involve interaction, asking and answering questions exchanging notes).

Listening Skills

Listening skills can be extensive (listening to something in a relaxed manner) or intensive(student listening with great attention and has a special task on worksheet designed to it).

Different kinds of listening material the teachers can use are: **Authentic materials** e.g. sports commentary, radio recording etc. **Recorded listening materials** that is specially scripted for teaching purposes. Live listening Materials is most useful as the teacher can herself speak the piece and simplify and slow down the listening text to suit her student's level.

The teachers have to guide the learners in different phases. First the learner has to be prepared for the exercise- this is termed as **the pre-listening phase**, the second step is the **while-listening phase** in which the learner completes the task set up for him. The final **post- listening phase** helps consolidate the learner's comprehension.

Integrating Listening with Speaking Reading and Writing: Listening activities can be integrated with the skills of speaking, reading and writing.

Integration can be done in two ways:

Listening as Input: For example, listening to a sports commentary and filling in the chart can be integrated with writing. The learners can complete the chart and write a newspaper report on their Sports Day. It can also be read as oral report, which can be read aloud for the next day's school assembly. Learners can also analyse the characteristics of a good commentary and then 'in groups' build up a commentary of another incident/event.

Listening as Stimulus: The listening material can be used as a stimulus, to set the learner thinking along the particular lines or put them in a particular mood. For example, after listening to a passage, the students discuss forming groups on certain issues. They can further write down slogans or make posters on that particular issue.

Teaching pronunciation

The course raises teacher's awareness of the importance of English pronunciation and is intended to help to improve the student's pronunciation as well. The students learn to distinguish between sound and spelling, use symbols for the sounds of English and to associate each symbol with the sound it represents, use the phonetic symbols to transcribe simple words pronounce them as they are transcribed, identify the number of syllabus in a word and the stressed syllable in it, apply rules for placement of stress on words with some derivational suffixes and stress the right words in context.

Use of Technology in the classroom

Teachers learn to implement technology in the classroom for enhancing language skills:

Word Processor: At the early level children can recognize letters of the alphabet by using keyboard. The addition of sound has an audio visual impact. The teacher could move on from letters towards using phonics and pictures. In later stages the teacher could be using words in sentences and at the final stage the students could learn to compose creative stories, writing reports.

Data base management and spread sheet Application: Students could be encouraged to collect data on issues e.g. eating habits, weather reports etc. They could be put on the spreadsheet and graphs developed. A series of question could be put up for students to answer, which require analysis and interpretation of graphs. The expected answers could be typed out using word processor or a presentation in a talk before the class.

Multimedia presentations: Multimedia materials could be used by students in the kindergarten stage where pictures interest them a lot. Even at a higher level pictures could be used to write essays, stories and used to learn other creative aspect of languages.

World Wide Web: Teachers can use 'Talking Books' to teach reading. Students can see the text and pictures as well as hear the text being read. They can link up with other schools in other countries and share books, ideas etc.

Project work

In the context of language learning, the learners can work on projects such as preparing an oral report, writing a survey report, preparing a radio programme etc. The four skills are exercised in an integrated manner and are used on a need basis making the students responsible for their own learning in order to complete the project.

A project is student-centered rather than teacher directed. The students have to hunt for or think out answers, work out ways to get the answers, locate sources and resources and utilize them for getting to

the answers. The teacher does all these himself under the guidance of the teacher who chooses to remain in the background intervening only when necessary.

In the end the teacher would help the students to evaluate their own projects and those of their peers. Hence the teacher would allow the students to improve upon the work. Once the project is done it should be given due recognition by the teacher by organizing displays or exhibitions.

Evaluation

Language learning is a continuous process and hence there is continuous evaluation of English. Informal continuous evaluation helps the teacher to cover all language skills, involve students in self and peer evaluation and use assessments like homework, assignments, observation, oral technique etc. This kind of evaluation helps in the improvement in learning.

Multiple Intelligence emphasizes the positive ways that people acquire knowledge and interact with the world, may be especially valuable to teachers working with mixed ability groups who have experienced repeated difficulties in learning. The teachers know each learner's learning style, which helps to draw their strengths and weaknesses.

New perspectives on errors: Errors have to be looked as positive signs of mental activity on the part of the learner as well as clues to the direction of the learners thinking. We look out errors as attempts at 'learning' rather than a 'failure to learn'.

The course also has interactive programme for the teachers for short durations (2 to 3 days) to discuss on the difficulties faced by the teachers in classroom and in the course. The programme also has audio, video components emphasizing the skills. The live interactive EDUSAT programme and the interactive radio counseling sessions are conducted regularly.

The program is different from the other custom-based courses for teachers as it is the only in-service programme for the unreached teachers. It looks at learners as social beings functioning in the multilingual environment with their own learning styles and emphasizes on the research-based understanding of the learner. The teacher understands each student's learning style. The programme enables to understand the true nature of language by going beyond the sentence level in grammar to a more holistic level, which incorporates the discourse perspective. It is one of the few courses that emphasizes on post-communicative teaching methods. The method of teaching shifts from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered one.

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