

## **INNOVATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO THE RURAL STUDENTS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY**

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### **Introduction**

English is currently the language of worldwide communication. Thus, the work of teachers of English as a second/ foreign language is increasingly visible and the education of teachers for English as a Second/ Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners has gained prominence. This article describes the development of an interdisciplinary model of foreign language teacher education. This new approach to language education aims at producing teachers with declarative knowledge and research tools on the one hand and the ability to cope with a heterogeneous classroom in a multicultural society on the other. English as a second language teaching has the potential to help language learners to proceed with a deep awareness and understanding of literacy development in both languages as well as the knowledge that the pupils' comprehension and verbal production is likely to be at a higher level in the mother tongue than in the foreign language. Thus, teaching ESL would be targeted at the level of the foreign language acquisition displayed by the learner and take into account the fact that though it is not the learner's first language, many cognitive processes are already in place.

### **The Goal of Teaching**

Staying awake and interested in class can be difficult. But what's even more difficult is being responsible for keeping students awake and interested. This is the first and foremost job of an ESL teacher. In order to be a great ESL teacher, one must not only teach, but inspire and empower. The goal is to excite the students about learning, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending English. Keep the advice in this article as a tool to be used often, and you will be one step closer to that goal.

### **Challenges in Teaching English as a Second Language**

Teaching English as a second language is a challenging, yet rewarding career. Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), must learn to constantly adapt to your students' needs. Many times, this means dealing with a variety of problems in the classroom, many of which are all too common occurrences. A good ESL teacher must be able to recognize these common problems, and work to find solutions. Even a small tweak in your teaching methods can help to create a more productive and casual environment for both you and your students. The English language teachers specially face a challenge as most children in our schools are first-generation

learners. English is alien to them. And credit is to be given to English language teachers for developing the motivation within them to learn the language.

## **Common Classroom Problems Faced by ESL Teachers**

### **Students become Overly Dependent on the Teacher**

Many times, students will automatically look to the teacher for correct answers instead of trying themselves. If the teacher obliges them with the answer each time, it can become a detrimental problem. Instead, focus on giving positive encouragement. This will help to make students more comfortable and more willing to answer (even if incorrectly).

### **Persistent Use of First-Language**

When teaching English as a second language, this is possibly the most common problem. As an ESL teacher, it's important to encourage students to use English, and only English. However, if students begin conversing in their first language, the teachers can move closer with the learners making their learning environment conducive. Another method is to establish a set of class rules and develop a penalty system for when they use their first language.

### **Uninterested Students**

This will happen, no matter what, in every classroom. If the entire class is acting up, it may be the fault of the teacher, i.e. boring material or poor classroom management. If it is one particular student, the ESL teacher should react swiftly to show dominance. In order to resolve such issues, an ESL teacher must be strict and institute discipline if needed.

### **Students don't have Clarity**

This happens far too often when teaching English as a foreign language. The fact is, it's often the fault of the teacher. If the teachers' instructions to an assignment yield looks of confusion and soft whispers among students, don't worry: there is a solution. In order to avoid this problem, it's important to make sure that the instructions are clear. Gestures, mime, and short concise sentences can be used to make it clear to the students. Most importantly, models and examples of the activity can also be provided to the learners.

### **Students Get Bored, Inattentive, or Unmotivated**

Many times, it is the teacher's fault that class is boring. Fortunately, with proper planning, this problem can be solved. Choice of a juicy theme to the lesson; one that the students can relate to and one that they will enjoy. This will automatically give them some motivation and interest. The ESL teacher should get to know the learners and identify their interests and needs, then design the course accordingly.

### **Strong Students Dominance**

ESL teachers will encounter learners with different capabilities and language skills. While it is good to have some students who excel in the classroom, it is important that they don't take away from others. If certain students begin to constantly steal the show, care should be taken to focus on calling on weaker students in the class to answer questions. The teachers must encourage, but gently deflect some answers from the strong students and give production time to other not-so-strong members of the class to perform and participate.

### **Students are Unprepared**

ESL teacher is for learners to drop out simply because they felt lost and/or unprepared. Concentration should be on a more shared learning experience. The Teacher must make sure that the students are all on the same page before moving onto a new topic by concept checking multiple times, and encouraging individual participation thereby involving all the learners in the classroom activity.

### **Need for Autonomy for the ESL Learners**

Some people mistake learner autonomy for self-instruction. Nothing could be further from the truth. Learner autonomy refers to a student's ability to set appropriate learning goals and take charge of his or her own learning. However, autonomous learners are also dependent upon teachers in some areas to create and maintain learning environments that support the development of learner autonomy. Teachers who model reflective practices themselves find it easier to create the appropriate learning environment to foster learner autonomy. This environment is one that is positive and motivating, and encourages collaboration and social interaction. It embeds reflective practices into daily learning activities. Learners accept responsibility for their learning, review their learning, and evaluate its effectiveness. The more learners begin to think about learning, the more transparent learning will become to them.

### **Creating Learner Autonomy**

The role of a teacher is very important in this process as 'the ability to behave autonomously for students is dependent upon their teacher creating a classroom culture where autonomy is accepted' (Barfield et al., 2001, p. 3). Teachers should try to regularly motivate learners to think about why they are learning certain things, exactly what they are learning, and how they learn most effectively. Learners should develop a capacity for reflection and recognize strategies that help them succeed. It is important that both the teacher and the learner use the target language as much as possible in the class, because it is only in using the language that learners can discover their strengths and identify areas of difficulty. English as a Second Language learners should be given numerous opportunities to use the target language in meaningful contexts with their peers. These activities create an environment that will reinforce each learner's goals, celebrate small successes, and gradually build awareness of the learning process.

### **Autonomous Learning Strategies**

Here are a few strategies that can help the ESL teachers to build an autonomous learning environment.

- Cooperative learning in pairs or small groups
- Problem-based learning situations that require students to use their knowledge to create solutions for specific situations
- Writing in journals and reflecting on what, why, and how they learn

- Assembling portfolios that document their learning process over a period of time
- Using rubrics that include the learner's individual expectations and a self-assessment component
- Peer assessment that allows students to evaluate each other using rubrics and clearly stated objectives

### **Autonomous Learning Activities**

There are also several activities can be used in ESL classroom as to build learning autonomy. Here are a few examples of activities that the ESL learners can be exposed to in order to create a self learning environment and to develop interest among the learners:

- Learner logs
- Think-Pair-Share
- K-W-L chart
- Application cards
- Admit and exit slips

### **Teaching English as a Skill**

Job market today expects a candidate to have good communication skills to succeed and sustain in a global world. English teachers have to remain extra cautious of developing in their students the ability of four language skills namely – LSRW. Hence, the teaching of English as a skill and not only as a subject becomes indispensable. There is a growing concentration about English in rural areas that it is a language of the elite. What causes more difficulty is that even English teachers themselves are not free from this phobia. One has to remember that the task of an English teacher is not confined to mere vernacular rendering of a prose or a poem. The nuances of verbal melody, the proper pronunciation and use of patterns too are important for the teachers to deliver the language skills effectively to the learners from rural backgrounds. How many English teachers have the patience to hear his students recite poem and then correct wherever the latter go wrong? A sincere teacher can go an extra mile and play the recorded rendering of the poem and allow students to recite with the same style. Some over-enthusiastic teachers most often explain the poem and block students' creative ability. Actually, they can be allowed to have their own explanation, if possible. They can also be allowed in groups to choose proper images and then after their discussion, write a short report and later present in the class. The learners can also be provided with some activities that can be performed individually through the support and guidance of the teacher. Such exercises, though may appear time-taking, yet are rewarding. These exercises help students enhance their four skills of language learning and also help the to develop an involvement in learning the language on their own.

### **Using Technology as an Aid for Teaching**

Technology assists students in the learning process modifying the way learning is delivered. Now learning has become a personalized and meaningful experience that meets learners' needs as opposed to traditional teacher - centered and text - based education that places primary emphasis on "conveying fixed bodies of information and viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge" (Alavi 1994, p.160). Hence, irrespective of their personal differences, preferences and histories, technology helps to deliver individualized content at the time and place students select (e-learning and mobile learning) thus increasing their learning spaces by taking learning out of the classroom. However, technology - supported learning can also be integrated into classroom teaching offering curriculum abounding in varied activities catering for the needs of every student (blended learning). The term blended learning is applied to learning that uses a variety of "the most effective training solutions, applied in a coordinated manner, to achieve learning objectives" (Wilson & Smilanrich 2005, p.3) usually with the computer or another mobile device that serves as a medium of facilitating learning and meeting the learning objectives. The most effective application of technology in education is connected with a variety of tools and methods it offers since no single teaching method can meet the needs of various learners (Wilson & Smilanrich 2005, p. 12)

Young people live their lives through technology: they are the web generation and they are hungry for more. Our challenge is to channel the natural enthusiasm our pupils have for ICT by using it in their everyday lives and embed it purposefully into the modern foreign languages classroom. There is great value in incorporating new technologies not as a bolt on or reward, but as an integral part of the process. This allows learners to foster the four c's: communication, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking. ICT lets learners easily draw on authentic resources that promote inter-cultural understanding and interact with virtual peers in real non-fabricated contexts.

Publishing students' multimedia outcomes on a blog or wiki gives them a real audience for their work, facilitates peer assessment through commenting and encourages them to raise their standards as a result. Virtual learning environments also offer students distance learning opportunities wherever and whenever they want. Tools like Padlet, Popplet, Linoit and Pinterest let students collaborate easily with others as a class or in small groups and reflect on learning.

Many ESL departments now run their own Twitter accounts to keep in touch with parents, inform pupils of important notices, for celebrating achievement and for retweeting interesting tweets about language learning such as authentic tweets in the target language or tweets for word/expression of the day. Technology lends itself very well to personalised and independent learning where students can work at their own pace, complete interactive exercises rigorously in class or at home and receive immediate feedback. Gaining points for their efforts and being able to compare their scores with their classmates is motivating for them too and adds an element of engaging gamification to their learning.

For any ESL teacher learning vocabulary is essential and Quizlet is an effective way of memorizing and embedding words, phrases and making sound spelling links. Students and teachers can search for existing lists and easily create their own. Socrative is another free cross-platform tool which allows for classroom voting, instant feedback and formative assessment. You can send students multiple choices, true or false or short answer questions as well self-marking pre-made quizzes. Furthermore, using avatars instead of real pupils' faces may encourage increased participation especially from reluctant learners.

Rehearsing, recording and editing spoken work digitally allows pupils to improve their pronunciation, boost their confidence, extend their speaking and listen back as many times as they like. They can also produce a script individually or collaboratively through a Google doc and import their text into an online teleprompter like Cue Prompter or the Visio prompt app so they can record their audio while it scrolls up the screen using Audacity or Voice Record Pro. Some departments employ this technique, as well as Textivate and Triptico, to help students learn their controlled assessment pieces.

Video is another powerful vehicle in and out of the languages classroom. Making videos draws upon multiple intelligences, promotes creativity and fosters collaboration. The process gives students ownership of their work which increases engagement. Pupils can produce short films in the target language, create animations using apps such as Yakit Kids, Puppet Pals and Explain Everything screencasts, as well as peer assess each other's work. These videos can be easily uploaded and stored in the cloud, used to form part of an e-portfolio over time and are accessible at all times. Other tools used for generating e-portfolios and submitting homework is Edmodo or Showbie. The advantage of these tools is that students don't require an email address just a class code.

Using video to flip the classroom is another possibility where learners access the lesson content they would normally learn in class, at home which frees up more class time for practising and accessing higher-order thinking skills. The MFL department at Wildern School in Hampshire is currently experimenting with flipping and recording their findings on a dedicated blog. Flipping doesn't have to involve creating lots of new material. It can be as simple as sharing existing PowerPoints or screencasts.

To support colleagues who find technology integration challenging, here are some suggestions:

- Lead by example and introduce some of the easier tools or apps to begin with to boost confidence and then share outcomes generated through their use.
- Team-teach a lesson incorporating technology and afterwards discuss the successes and challenges.
- Offer in-house mentoring sessions at lunchtime, after school or during professional development days.
- Nominate student digital leaders who can troubleshoot issues and offer support in class.
- Propose having technology as a performance management target.

For the current generation of teachers using digital media may be a challenge. The good news is by using social media for support and integrating available tools and apps, connected teachers can access technology's power and potential for language learning.

## **Conclusion**

It is rare to find a language class that does not use some form of technology. In recent years, technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. Some technology tools enable ESL teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Distance learning programs can enable language educators to expand language-learning opportunities to all students, regardless of where they live, the human and material resources available to them, or their language background and needs. In sum, technology continues to grow in importance as a tool to assist teachers of English as a second language in facilitating and mediating language learning for their students. While technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment. In some cases, however, school and university administrators have permitted technology to drive the language curriculum and have even used it to replace certified language teachers. ESL learners will acquire the language effectively through technology without interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher.

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