

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:
INNOVATIVE METHODS AND PRACTICES

Editors

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (ELT@I)
TIRUPATI CHAPTER

RESEARCH INDIA PRESS
NEW DELHI (INDIA)

CONTENTS

Title of the Paper	Author's	Page No
Towards Values Education: An Academic Imperative for Student Well-being	Prof. Sreedhar Murkaram	02
Does Lexis Hold the Key to Language Learning?	Dr. P. Hari Padma Rani	05
English Language Skill Development through Technology Mediated Tasks	Dr. K. Narasimha Rao	07
Towards Inquiry Based Learning: Teaching Students to Ask their Own Questions	Dr. Pushpa Nagini Sripada	10
Vocabulary Enrichment: A Practical Approach	Dr. G. Reddi Sekhar Reddy	11
Language Laboratory: A Technological Boon for Second Language Learning	Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan	13
Technical Communication is the Most Sought after Skill of Engineering Students	R. Devarajulu Reddy	15
Principled Eclecticism in English Language Teaching	Dr. B. Bala Nagendra Prasad Prof. M. A. K. Sukumar	17
How to Develop Accuracy in Speech and Writing Skills at Tertiary Level?	Dr. Ch. Suvarna Ragini	20
Musings on Mysterious Magic	Dr. K. Usha Sharma	22
Innovative Methods in ELT	Ms. Guntasha Tulsi	24
Cooperative Learning in Alleviating Communicative Anxiety of the Undergraduate Engineering Students at VIT University - A Case Study	Dr. V. Bhuvaneshwari	26
Teaching English Language in Rural Areas: Realities and Remedies	Dr. R. Manjula	28
Integrating Active Learning Methods with Technology in English Language Classroom	Dr. K. Madhu Murthy	30
Social Networks in Language Teaching and Learning	Rajyalaxmi Yesireddy Dr. M. Latha	33
Teaching English through Innovative Activities	Dr. S. M. Chillur	36
English Language Teaching Methods - An Overview	Dr. T. Sujatha	38
Role of Films in Elevating Language Agilities in ELT Classroom	M. Vanisree	40
Teaching English through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	Dr. Kottacheruvu Nagendra	43
Language Laboratories and Their Significance in ELT	Dr. Parimala Nijagal	45
Meta Cognition- A Move Towards Writing Skill Development in English	Jeen Peter	47
Virtual Reality Education for Students	Dr. D. Nagarathinam Prof. L. Lakshmanan	49
Enriching Vocabulary for Communicative Competence	Dr. D. R. Pratima Roy	51
Problems with Prepositions	Dr. D. Nagarathinam Prof. L. Lakshmanan	53
Content-based Instruction: Myth or Reality in Indian Context	Dr. J. John Sekar	56

27	Role of E-learning and V in English Language Learning
28	English Language in Pr
29	The Importance of the World: A Positive Stud
30	The Role of ICT in th Language and Literatu
31	Stumbling Blocks in F A Study from Lahiri
32	Teaching English
33	Personal and Profession
34	Paradigm Shift and C Language Teaching in Technical Education
35	Student-Centered Lea Approach
36	Effective Strategies Learners
37	Evaluation on Engli Developing Commu Students under JNT
38	English Language T Level
39	English Language t
40	ICT Awareness and Language to Engin
41	Integrating Langua
42	The Role of News Language Skills
43	The Transcendent Language
44	History of ELT in
45	Teaching English Methods
46	News Bulletins in Study
47	Technological H
48	Language and S
49	Career Oriented
50	Impact of Stress Academic Perfo
51	Language in Ac

Title : Teaching English Language and Literature: Innovative Methods and Practices

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Publisher : Research India Press,
E6/34, I Floor, Sangam Vihar, New Delhi - 110062,
Ph: 011-26047013; 09818085794
Email: researchindiapress@gmail.com

First edition : August 2016

Pages : 279 + 8 = 287

Price : Rs: 995/-

ISBN : 978-93-5171-101-8

Printed at : Research India Press, New Delhi

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Innovative Methods in ELT

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English Language Teaching, better identified with its popular acronym ELT, has gradually and distinctively emerged as a distinctive field of investigation in research within humanities in India as well as the Indian classroom. This has led to one very significant outcome. The same has been that it has invested that element of seriousness to language teaching, which has both empowered and enabled language teachers to optimize best results within the classroom. Here, it would be instructive to pause to briefly understand the history and beginnings of ELT in India. It is interesting to observe that 'English' was introduced and popularized amongst a certain section of Indian elite for the administrative convenience of the British. Their cultural or linguistic innovations were never divested from their political circumstances.

The concept of 'Englishness' could be more widely felt in the form of a literary canon that was introduced and popularized in the form of English literature syllabus across the newly established universities in Bombay, Bengal and Madras. Incidentally then, language acquisition was just an administrative priority for the British which gradually became synonymous with a culturally supremacist educational policy. When India became independent and English was given the status of an 'associate official language', it is interesting to note that language teaching actually became a priority with the authorities. In light of the same, CIEFL (The Central Institute for English and Foreign Languages) was set up at Hyderabad. Regional institutes for ELT training and development were also set at Bangalore and Chandigarh.

It however was an extremely long drawn process for an Indian college classroom to concede that training in English has to go beyond the literary realm into a skill based activity, which more than intellectual competency, required functional and communicative competency. What lend a credibility to this thought beyond numerous developments related to debates surrounding education in the mother tongue, L-1 etc. was, that now in a globalised set-up, and with the post-1960's context of breaking of world-barriers and immigration, English speaking and writing skills were to almost become indispensable. This was also connected to the foregrounding of the three-language formula in post-independent India, as a necessary component of school education, which did lend a formal component to the learning of English. As a generation of Indians began to be upwardly mobile in their thinking and with more multi-nationals and call-centers entering into the Indian market, English learning began to be perceived through a different yardstick altogether.

The focus now was more on language acquisition and proficiency. It became significant to assure that whether a learner is adept with grammatical and linguistic accuracy or not; it becomes more crucial to adapt to social and real life situations where a good command over English language can be an immensely useful asset. However, while the post-1990's Indian situation did wake up to this reality in relation to the socio-lingual context; it was the college classroom that struggled to make newer kind of changes. As a part of the liability of the colonial educational policy, there continued to be a major emphasis on the teaching of literary studies in an English classroom in most of the major Indian universities. Language training was considered to be an integral part of this training in

literature and cultural studies, or assumed to be incidental or peripheral to training the students in learning more about the literary canon. In fact, it is interesting to observe that for most of the language courses also designed to improve proficiency of students; an array of literary texts are chosen and anthologies are devised. Their teaching leads to the presumption that language has been 'taught' to students.

Interestingly, two developments within the higher educational framework pushed the benchmark for possible innovations in relation to English Language teaching. These were largely connected to a reformulation of language courses (largely as subsidiary/allied/inter-disciplinary) as a part of under-graduation syllabus across universities, or a newer impetus to research and pedagogy in language teaching, that gradually also did become connected to material production and development. With the proliferation of organizations related to bodies like the British Council, English language proficiency and learning was to get new dimensions, and was to also soon become a fashionably commercial and exorbitant exercise. How innovative did the scenario then become as far as the domain of material production and pedagogy in higher education has been concerned?

A set of positive changes have certainly been visible. Firstly, it is evident in the act of text-book designing itself for an undergraduate language programme. There has certainly come to be a greater focus on an integrated development of LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) with also a closer focus on learner centered exercises and an adequate and equal importance provided to proficiency in grammar, speaking skills or communicative aspects integral to purposes of courses in language proficiency. Simultaneously, at least at the level of syllabus; equal importance now seems to be given to areas like Grammar, Spoken English or Academic Writing with different components within the course addressing these issues. One will take the example of Delhi University and Jawahar Lal Nehru University- two pioneering universities in Delhi- to explain this point in detail.

Different changes that have taken place in the last two years, have encouraged an emphasis on language proficiency, at the level of discourse and usage, rather than correctness or rules; and this is indeed a welcome change. In Delhi University for instance, there are courses like 'Business English', 'Technical Writing', 'Academic Writing' or 'English Communication' which seem to have been designed keeping in aspect the functional aspect of the language in mind. The goal seems to be to train students in the light of that expression of English language which can make them efficient communicators and writers at their workplace or interviews, and skillful in handling discussions around their preferred career option after under-graduation. Now here it seems- that the problem is not what used to be two decades back- i.e. "designing" of the course, but is more connected to the execution itself.

This is where the role of innovative methodologies central to ELT pitches itself. As teachers of English, there has been too much of a tendency to look down upon the language aspect of teaching and too much of pre-occupation with