

Title: Innovations in classroom teaching and effectiveness of e-learning. (sub-theme)

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Introduction:

The globalization of virtually every aspect of the economy the world over – and more so for a developing economy like India – has brought into question the very credibility of any and every function of the economy – and by extension, every sector of the economy – that does not evolve, rather that does not satisfy the demands of the ever-updated consumer, an entity that now reigns supreme. And the student of the present day is a classic blend of knowledge, effort and expectation. The point is the student today knows exactly what to expect. This perhaps arises from the rise in competition from the stiff to the absolutely cut-throat. So much that the employable age of the student the world over has fallen from that of the post-graduate to that of the under-graduate. As a fallout, classroom teaching too has undergone a sea of change and aims straight at making the student job-ready and capable to meet the ever-increasing demands of a market-oriented economy. Teaching now per force has to be learner centric and the teacher himself is now seen more as a guide, a facilitator and a partner in the process of learning. The advances in technology have all but substituted human effort. What, however, cannot be ever replaced is the human touch, followed by human interpretation. It is in this context that this study attempts to investigate the possible avenues that can be developed and administered to ensure effective education that goes beyond the realm of education as a mere accessory to obtain employment and places in the hands of the student a tool that would prove useful throughout. Student centric methods of teaching are but an endeavour to look at the written and spoken word in a manner that would simplify the matter taught to the student to such an extent that he or she can apply the knowledge gathered practically, if necessity be. In the traditional approach to college teaching, most class time is spent with the professor lecturing and the students watching and listening. The students work individually on assignments, and cooperation is discouraged. Student-centered teaching methods shift the focus of activity from the teacher to the learners. These methods include **active learning**, in which students solve problems, answer questions, formulate questions of their own, discuss, explain, debate, or brainstorm during

class; **cooperative learning**, in which students work in teams on problems and projects under conditions that assure both positive interdependence and individual accountability; and **inductive teaching and learning**, in which students are first presented with challenges (questions or problems) and learn the course material in the context of addressing the challenges. This does not in any way undermine the importance – in fact supremacy – of the teacher, as any confusion that hinders the student's understanding process can only be cleared by the teacher's explanation. Contrary to traditional thinking, student centric methods of teaching act as an effective partner to teacher centric methods of teaching, the simple reason being that they are complements and not opponents. In addition, when we consider the compulsions faced by techno centric teaching methods, such as limitations of the technological medium used and the level of ability of the student to operate and interpret the results, as also the compatibility of the medium with the intelligence level of the student, we can only turn to student centric methods of teaching for refuge. But then, if we look closely at the pros and cons of all the teaching methods available, an optimum mixture of various methods applicable would be the most appropriate, subject to individual interpretation of what is optimum.

E – learning: E-learning is the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio. E-learning includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching, including educational technology. The information and communication systems, whether networked learning or not, serve as specific media to implement the learning process. This often involves both out-of-classroom and in-classroom educational experiences via technology, even as advances continue in regard to devices and curriculum. Abbreviations like CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used as synonyms to e-learning. E-learning is a means of implementing education that can be applied

within varying education models (for example, face to face or distance education) and educational philosophies (for example behaviourism and constructivism). In effect, e – learning may be viewed as a means of education as opposed to a mode of education. In other words, e – learning involves the use of a number of technological tools that can be applied in various contexts; it is not a distinctive educational system in itself. Therefore e – learning cannot be compared with face to face delivery or distance education because it can be used within either of these models. Instead, e – learning is a means by which these education models can be implemented.

Benefits of E-learning : These could be enlisted as follows :

1. Learning activity can be scheduled around work and family .
2. Major savings on time and travelling cost for off-campus students .
3. Students can select learning materials as per their ability and interest .
4. Learning need not be within a classroom .
5. Self-paced learning modules allow students to work at their own pace
6. Students can solve their difficulties at any time without disturbing their privacy .
7. E – learning encourages more student participation as it reserves the privacy of the student .
8. E -learning can accommodate different learning styles and facilitate learning through a variety of activities .
9. E – learning keeps students updated with latest computer based knowledge and developments on the internet .
10. The availability of a large number of e – learning courses encourages students to keep their learning process continuing .
11. Evaluation and incorporation of latest knowledge becomes easier and more accessible .

There is however a downside to this seemingly rosy picture of e – learning . Students with limited learning capacity may tend to give up the learning process. Again, those used to the traditional mode of teaching may not find the physical

absence of the teacher very easy to digest. Besides, teacher may not be available online when perhaps the student needs him most. Another serious limitation of e – learning is the possibility of a slow or irregular internet connection, especially in remote areas. Regular upgradation of computer technology may not be feasible for many students. Again, simulation in a virtual classroom is not easy for an average student.

And yet E – learning is the order of the day and crosses path with the modern student at some time or the other.

The technique of teaching employed notwithstanding, classroom teaching today has to ensure a few practical features –

- There is reliance on active rather than passive learning.
- Emphasis is laid on practical learning and understanding.
- Increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student.
- Increased sense of autonomy in the learner.
- Interdependence between teacher and learner.
- Mutual respect within the learner - teacher relationship.
- A reflexive approach of both teacher and learner.
- The learner has full responsibility for her/his learning
- Involvement and participation are the key words.
- The relationship between learners is one of promoting equality and growth.
- The teacher becomes more of a facilitator and a resource person.
- The learner experiences solidarity with his education.
- The learner's outlook changes and he/she looks at things objectively.

In doing so, the teacher – now a facilitator – may do well to incorporate a few positive approaches in his / her methodology :

- Ask, don't tell: always try to elicit information, ideas, and answers from the students. They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by the all-knowing teacher. They have knowledge and experiences of life, as well as language which can contribute greatly to the learning process. The more they contribute, the more they are likely to remember. We should never underestimate the ability of our students.
- Focus on students' experience and interests: if the teacher chooses the topic, or just follows the course book, the students may not be interested. If, however, teachers use the course book as a base for then moving on to practice activities relating to the students' personal lives and areas of interest and experience (personalisation), the students are more likely to become involved in the lesson, thereby remembering more.
- Communication over accuracy: the main reason for students learning a language is to be able to communicate with other speakers of that language. Students therefore need opportunities to practise communicating in English without the constant fear of making mistakes hanging over them. If you feel the need to correct their mistakes, don't interrupt their conversations, make notes and give feedback later.
- Learning by doing: the more actively involved students are in their own learning, the more they are likely to remember what they learn. So, guide them instead of directing them.
- Students have choices: and make decisions about learning. Group work requires negotiation and decision making – working together towards a common goal.
- Focus on confidence building: to develop skills to face the practical world. By developing the ability to communicate effectively, language again becomes more 'real' and part of the students' lives.
- Encourage interest in English: used in the real world. By using authentic materials familiar to the students (magazines, the internet, video, television, letters etc.), students are constantly in touch with the language in an way they find interesting.

- Open-ended conclusions: there is more than one possible answer. Traditional grammar based tasks are either right or wrong and test only one skill at a time. They are generally unimaginative, often in the form of multiple choice answers (so the students have a 25% chance of being right without actually knowing the answer at all) and totally removed from practical situations. Open-ended tasks are wider in their focus and involve a variety of language skills.
- Students learn: more than just language. They be encouraged to think critically and develop problem-solving skills through creative tasks and group work.

In keeping with the above deliberations, many modern methods of learning are being adopted by more and more teachers, especially since the imparting of the curriculum makes it imperative. Let us consider a few points –

1. Learning accounts today would be a practical without learning Tally.
2. Teaching or understanding nano-technology would be one big task without the use of computers.
3. Discussing history or geography is so much the easier with simulated models on the internet.
4. Necessary upgradation in academic qualifications is infinitely easier through computer – based learning.

All this goes to show the indispensability of computers as a tool for learning. But then the centre of all teaching is the student and his ability to learn. Accordingly, some student – friendly techniques used by teachers are as follows –

- 1. Problem-Based Learning:** Students are challenged to learn by working cooperatively to find solutions to real-life problems. Curiosity and interest in the process occurs naturally as students work in teams to solve authentic dilemmas. The skill of the teacher lies, of course, in selecting those problems

for students to ponder over as would step-wise enhance their knowledge and also imbibe into them a sense of scientific inquiry.

2. **Inquiry/Discovery Methods:** Asking puzzling questions sparks students' mental stimulation and quickly gets them thinking critically. Once a situation has been presented, students gather information by formulating their own questions. They then research answers in cooperative groups, pairs, or individually. The teacher- or rather the facilitator- could guide them along and channelize their thought-processes so as not only to get answers but also to develop alternatives.
3. **Inductive Methods.** Like inquiry strategies, inductive models of teaching begin with a question or series of unknown facts or concepts and move toward known information. Learners search for answers to these "unknowns" in an active fashion. Instead of lecturing, teachers take on the role of facilitator or coach when using inductive methods. Curiosity of the student is what the teacher has to use so that he/she can develop a unique answer to the question in concern.
4. **Role-Play.** Role-play situations require students to step out of the confines of traditional roles and take on the characteristics of someone else. Role-play encourages creativity and high levels of thought on the part of the student. This strategy is most successful when students are given time to research the character they must portray. This strategy of learning has psychological implications and the outcome of using this strategy depends not only on the ability of the facilitator to explain but also on the ability of the recipient to grasp. The problem with using this method is gauging the depth and manner of interpretation by the student.
5. **Simulation.** Similar to role-play, simulations involve approximating real-life scenarios in the classroom. Students are involved in the reproduction of possible situations. Simulations often include scripted representations that enable learners to closely experience world events. Whereas role-play depends on interpretations, simulation works on assumptions. Assumptions mainly about the authenticity of the reproduced model. Problems arise in simulation when the occurrences leading to the situation under consideration are either not interpreted correctly or not reproduced in full.
6. **Cooperative Learning.** Working together in pairs or small groups to collaborate on a specific task benefits students socially as well as cognitively. Learners depend on each other to reach their goals and practice

social interaction skills. Activities such as Think Pair Share partners and the formation of expert groups of students, created to teach fragments of materials to other students, are examples of learners working together toward a common goal. The teacher's role is mainly that of a guide and a time-keeper.

Whatever be the technique used, a few provisions are imperative-

- Provision for substances and arrangement of activities must be made in line with the learners' interests and aptitudes, bearing in mind individual differences.
- Effective training must be provided in thinking processes, management of situations, on how to face various situations and application of knowledge for simplifying and solving problems.
- Activities must be organized in a way that encourages the learners to draw from authentic experience, to think critically and develop a desire for knowledge.
- The learning process must be as enriching an experience for the teacher as for the learner to ensure a continuous exchange of ideas and development of knowledge.

In effect, innovative teaching practices today requires the teachers to develop and sharpen a few personal skills as follows –

- giving useful practical suggestions – just a few tips to guide students.
- giving constructive feedback- to encourage and build the students' confidence.
- acting as a language resource- to enable them to express effectively.
- monitoring student work- so that they don't go astray.
- improvising teaching of language points- to make the students' understanding more relative and effective.
- coping with the unexpected- sudden spurts of vision can only be expected from students and these must be dealt with sensitively.
- coping with students with different learning styles- to ensure that their sensitivities are not hurt.

- creating their own materials- a measure that enables the teacher to share his/her own experience with the students.
- approaching the community for guidance- society and the practical world are, in the ultimate analysis, the real teachers.

Conclusion: Ever-changing that the world around us is today, we cannot even begin to sufficiently emphasise the indispensability of the learner's aptitude, making it imperative that the teacher evolves continuously to become an able guide, an able administrator, a dependable facilitator and a dear friend for all time to come.

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