

Continuous Professional Development of English Teachers : Technology Supported Language Teaching

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Abstract: English language teachers of today need to explore new possibilities and avenues for promoting better language skills development among learners. Changes have been happening in the academic and professional environment of developing knowledge societies and skills development has acquired renewed focus. English language learning is an essential professional skill, and ELT teachers, especially those teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to undergraduate engineering students in colleges and universities, need to be adequately prepared to train a whole new generation of young minds. This paper attempts to identify ways through which ELT teachers can equip themselves adequately to make the language learning process of learners more effective and meaningful. The purpose of this paper is to help ELT teachers understand existing ELT theories, update their knowledge about Language Teaching, and thereby enhance their ability to design materials for use by learners.

Key Words: English Language teaching, Communicative language Teaching, Professional development, Material Production.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language teachers need to keep developing their teaching skills, as expected of other professionals today[1]. Continuous Professional Development [CPD] is also seen as an unending learning process, and for teachers, it is essential to keep themselves updated and well-informed [2]. Furthermore, from an ELT perspective, this development goes beyond personal awareness and reflection to a renewed understanding of the current trends and theoretical practices that constantly keep evolving at the international level. This makes it essential for teachers to become accustomed to such evolving change. Apart from education and training, the knowledge and skill of teachers are also influenced by their experience and collaborative initiatives, mainly through networking with others in the same domain[3]. This paper, after highlighting the current position of ELT, for those who would find this information relevant and useful, tries to present a few important aspects of CPD that will make novice English Language Teachers be aware of the new directions in language teaching. The objective is not to be prescriptive, but to facilitate the understanding of new avenues that are available to support the pedagogic process. The motive is to make teachers apply them in real-time, both while facilitating their learners and in materials production.

2. ELT THEORIES – A CHRONOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

A good understanding of ELT theories and a strong foregrounding in it is essential for ELT practitioners. From Modernism to Post Modernism and from Structuralism to Post Structuralism, learning theory and methodology had undergone a lot of change. In parallel to that, ELT theory had also been through a process of change as several methods were adopted in language teaching, each with its own merits and demerits. For example, Skinner believed that language was to be considered as a verbal behavior and this behavioral aspect which included positive reinforcement and repetition, in the classroom teaching, would allow teachers to train their students to excel both academically and personally[4]. On the other hand, Structuralism focused on the cognitive domain of the learner[5]. And cognitive psychologists, who shared with behaviourists the belief that the study of learning should be objective and that learning theories should be developed from the outcome of experiential research, however disagreed with the behaviourists in one critical aspect. By observing the responses that individuals make to different stimulus conditions, Cognitivists believed that inferences could be drawn about the nature of the internal cognitive processes that produce those responses. The subsequent change that happened with the advent of Post-structuralism, gave more importance to meaning than to structures. The text and the reader gained importance from the author in the post-structuralist theory because of the notion that meaning existed inside the text which was not fixed. It emphasized the idea that to understand a text, it was more necessary to know about the text and also about the knowledge system which had produced it. An important technique that evolved during this period was the theory of ‘deconstruction’[6]. The theory of socio cognitivism

explained this condition clearly as it stated that individual knowledge acquisition is directly related to the person's ability to socialize and interact with other people. It was in this context that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was propounded by theorists who explained that CLT aimed to build the learners' communicative competence. A distinction was made between the grammatical rules of usage that enabled users to construct correct sentences and the use of language to accomplish some kind of communicative purpose.

In this approach, interaction was considered the primary function of language with the structure of language reflecting in functional and communicative uses. Teachers were to help the learners to work with the language. The focus was more on real communication, with importance given to meaning and the introduction of authentic texts of real-life situations that would provide opportunities for learners to enhance their personal experiences and space for the learners to experiment and build communicative competence[7]. This methodology, that helped learners to use the target language as much as possible and supported a learner-centric approach to language learning, predominantly aimed to develop students' confidence, reinstating the fact that the teachers should use a lot of fluency-based activities.

In the Post Method era, a period in which the use of the Eclectic or the Best method is certainly the most recommended option to be chosen by ELT teachers to achieve an effective realization of learning outcomes, the need to adopt proven next-generation pedagogic practices cannot be neglected or overlook.

3. CPD IN THE 21ST CENTURY:

With the shift from modernist concepts that supported closed processes, stability and focused thinking style to a more post-modernist approach that encouraged multi-directional functioning and dynamic systems, the demands placed on the teaching community has increased and so are the expectations from all quarters[8]. With the focus on new levels of knowledge acquisition and skills development, teachers should relate to exploiting new opportunities available in the age of information technology. Hence it is vital to synchronize knowledge development with technological innovations that drive futuristic perspectives, be it general or in the realm of language teaching with the objective to augment learners to achieve sustainable development. It is in this context, English Language teachers should realise the need to stay informed about developing new trends in learning and stay connected with teacher support networks to stay updated.

3.1 Online learning

The best available resource today for language teachers to update their knowledge, amidst their busy schedule and responsibilities, that usually keeps them fixed in their place of work, is to attend webinars hosted by publishing houses and organizations or institutions of international repute in the field of applied linguistics and language learning. Massive Open Online Courses[MOOC] and Online resources provide unprecedented learning possibilities and offer the teaching community new avenues to learn further. On the other hand, online discussion forums open-up prospects to forge a relationship with like-minded people across the world community. Technology supported learning has added value to the learning experience and mode by breaking boundaries related to place and time[9].

3.2 Flipped Learning

Another learner-centric approach is to integrate technology-enabled learning with flipped classroom teaching. Teachers need to be willing to guide learners by encouraging learners to learn both by using and creating resources, modeled on standard resources that include acclaimed books, web resources from reputed publishing or broadcasting houses, and also from peers with a fairly good amount of expertise. This will set learners on a course in which they learn through collaborative learning and reach a level wherein they become ready to discuss the learning process with other learners[10].

3.3. MATERIAL PRODUCTION

English language teachers in India and most of the non-native English speaking countries have traditionally depended on prepared and readily available teaching material for classroom use. At the school level, the prescription and use of standard textbooks is the usual practice. However, the same trend is observed at the tertiary level, with very few teachers experimenting with materials production. One of the reasons for language teachers to shy away from preparing materials is their inability to produce quality materials because of the lack of foregrounding in ELT theoretical principles and any attempt to produce materials outside this framework usually results in the creative materials that do not conform to accepted standards. Material production has to include requirements like the purpose of producing the text, the theoretical framework to be used, the specific needs of the target audience, expected outcomes, etc.

4. CREATING MATERIALS:

Materials production in today's digital world goes beyond the printed material to include the digital content comprising of videos, audios, multi-media texts, etc. However, the importance of a textbook from a renowned author

through a reputed publisher is not to be undermined[11]. So from this aspect, it is very important that well before starting the actual work of producing materials it is very important to create a road map of the process of preparing materials.

4.1 The technology Interface

The use of NewsApps available on a mobile phone, to generate learning resources, will increase the level of involvement of learners, promote self-learning, and at the same time providing the flexibility of use. The News apps, that provide a variety of content and an engaging interface for learners to access information in the target language, can be effectively used to promote content and language integrated learning. This will promote inter-disciplinary learning and at the same time support teaching across the curricular [12]. This content available will sustain language acquisition and also help teachers to adhere to the communicative language teaching framework that aims to make learners learn by doing things, especially with language[13].

4.2. Newsapps - A Process Based Approach

4.2.1 Research Objective

- (i) is to help English Language Teachers to make the language learning process of learners effective.
- (ii) is to help ELT teachers adopt current pedagogic practices to sustain and enhance language learning
- (iii) is to integrate next-generation learning technology and tools for promoting language learning.

4.2.2 Methodology

The objective is to promote incidental learning of language using real-time information available on a mobile platform. The ease of access to good quality language and the nature of content that is so varied and diverse will ensure better learner engagement and motivation. The use of a dual learning technique, in which learners learn the language and at the same time utilize the available resource to gather information, will support teachers to foster better skills development.

4.2.3 Framing the task - Sample

- (i) Learners were asked to install *Inshorts* NewsApps [14], on the mobile phone. The NewsApps provides a repository of news items, past and present.
- (ii) The teachers provided support and also asked the learners to use a free online text to speech converter to create an audio file- This makes available the News item both in audio format for listening and text format for reading,
- (iii) Learners were then asked to identify items to develop communicative and linguistic competence with the support of a reference material or a text-book.[In this case Interchange Student Book 2] [15]
- (iv) Subsequently, learners were asked to generate a text using the words identified. The new text generated may be a critical explanation of the News item or an analysis of the News-Item,
- (v) Finally, learners are asked to write a new News Items based on the experience that they had acquired.

4.2.4. Findings

The guided method of helping learners to acquire writing a new item using a NewsApps, it was observed, made learners generate a better text as a result of making them adopt a logical way in learning to produce language. The use of technology for language learning has made it evident, that from a performance perspective, it helps learners in a big way and the teacher stands to benefit a lot from it.

5. CONCLUSION:

Each of the strategies furnished in this paper has a specific role in the development of enriching the knowledge of a language teacher that will support CPD. There is no one size fits all approach; the teacher should come out of their docile position and it is the responsibility of the teacher to identify the most suitable eclectic method to improve and enhance their profession. This approach will help teachers to sustain in the field of teaching, renew the commitment, create interest in the mind of learners and establish themselves as a preferred knowledge resource in their profession. Future research can be carried out by studying various new conventions followed by the western world and the innovations that happen in language learning habitats across the world.

The fact that good proficiency in the English language will open several doors of opportunity and is vital to the academic and professional success of students, has increased the need for adopting the latest teaching methods in ELT. A lot of research has to be further carried out to understand how English can be best taught and learned based on widely practiced ELT theoretical and pedagogic perspectives of the 21st century.

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