

Overcoming Fundamental Challenges in ELT Classroom

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Abstract

As English language teachers, we face many challenges in our classroom particularly dealing with mixed ability students, managing classroom discipline, motivating learners, presenting new topics, improving learners' pronunciation, using appropriate classroom language, encouraging less motivated learners, and dealing with homework. In this light, present article attempts to deal with some of these topics in brief and provides some useful tips to overcome such challenges in the form of reflection of a practicing teacher/ teacher trainer after the references mentioned at the end of this article.

Key words: Motivation, mixed ability class, classroom discipline, learners' pronunciation, dealing with homework

Motivating learners

Motivation is the factor that determines a person's desire to do something in learning. It is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action. Motivated learners are those who are eager to invest effort in teaching learning activities. Arousing learner's motivation is one of the greatest challenges of L2 teachers. If learners are fully motivated towards learning; they can learn the matter easily. It is said that if learners are fully motivated, 50% teaching tasks would be finished. Therefore, L2 teachers should create motivation for successful learning.

Some useful tips for motivating learners

- Make the learners' aware of the

objectives of the task

- Encourage and praise learners about their task
- Provide entertainment by telling jokes, stories, songs, rhymes, etc.
- Develop positive attitudes towards target language and culture
- Use different types of teaching materials- pictures, realia, modals, and cassettes.
- Make proper physical condition of classroom: size, arrangement, groupings, sitting, etc.
- Conduct learner-centered techniques: role play, project work, pair work, group work, etc.
- Mix a lesson with various activities such as language games, debates,

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- speech, puzzles, quiz competition, etc.
- Build good rapport with students being friendly, cooperative and democratic
- Use visuals instead of acoustics
- Do not use the same technique in class
- Use appropriate classroom language
- Use paralinguistic features while teaching
- Relate tasks to real life situation
- Speak politely with your students
- Share your good experiences with all students
- Always give feedback to your students
- Value the students' ideas
- Make your students challengeable providing creative tasks
- Appreciate English language with your students
- Learn to call your students
- Chat with your students; show an interest in them as individual
- Interact more, lecture less and focus on active learning
- Be polite, gentle, flexible and respectful to your learners

Handling mixed-ability classes

The class with varying levels of performance (fast learners and slow learners), ages (less experienced and more experienced learners), personalities (extrovert and introvert), and dependency of the teachers (dependent and autonomous), learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group and individual) and preferences (participatory and silent learners) is referred to as mixed-ability class. Many teachers are extremely worried about such classes with different level of proficiency of the students since it is very difficult for the teachers to make their planning successfully. Different placement and aptitude tests as well as students'

groupings can help the teachers to manage such classes. The teachers frequently respond to students' performance and give them appropriate assessment and feedback. Moreover, they should help to promote learners' autonomy to handle such classes.

Some useful tips for handling mixed-ability classes

- Use different teaching aids to increase learners' participation and comprehension
- Explain the same topic through multiple angles
- Make the class more interactive with pair works and group works
- Establish a good rapport with all students
- Be well prepared with effective and clear presentation skills
- Encourage them to provide different responses
- Identify their linguistic background
- Use students: better students help weaker ones
- Use different tasks with the same materials
- Maximize learners' creative involvement in the adaptation of materials
- Update your knowledge for effective presentation
- Reward early finishers

Creating classroom discipline

As English language teachers, we have to face very large and over-crowded classes in context of Nepal. There may be more than 50 students in a single class room. In context of such classes, teachers generally feel greater burdens and challenges than in normal classes. Although teachers are teaching in harsh mood, their students are not obeying them. Instead, they are continuously engaging themselves in other

activities and making noises in the class room. To teach in large classes, the teacher, first of all, should create class room discipline in the following ways:

Some useful tips for creating class room discipline

- Get silence before you start speaking to the class
- Know and address students
- Prepare the lesson thoroughly
- Be mobile: walk around the class
- Start the lesson with bang and sustain interest and curiosity
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Make sure your instructions are clear
- Look at the class when speaking
- Design the task in accordance with learners' age, ability, style and cultural background
- Vary your teaching technique
- Anticipate discipline problem and act quickly
- Avoid confrontations
- Show yourself as supporter and helper to the students
- Do not patronize students, treat them with respects
- Use humor constructively
- Tell jokes, songs, rhymes and stories in the class
- Choose topics and tasks that will activate students
- Be warm and friendly to the students
- Keep eye-contact with your students
- Smile with your students

Improving learners' pronunciation

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects of language teaching since language is primarily

speech. It does not only deals with the segmental sounds such as vowels and consonants but also studies supra-segmentals, such as length, pitch, tones, intonations, etc. in one hand and connected speech on the other. To enhance effective communication, interlocutors must have the knowledge of pronunciation skill. If there is slight change in the pronunciation of words or utterances, the meaning would also be different. Therefore, L2 teacher should focus on those activities that improve learners' pronunciation.

Some useful tips for improving learners' pronunciation

- Imitation of teacher or recorded model of sounds, words and sentences
- Recording of learner speech contrasted with native learners
- Systematic explanations and instruction (including details of the structure and movements of parts of speech)
- Imitation drills: repetition of sounds, words and sentences
- Choral repetition of drills
- Varied repetition drills (varied speech, volume, mood)
- Learning and performing dialogues
- Learning by heart of sentences, rhymes, jingles
- Jazz chants
- Minimal pairs and related activities- 'cat and cut'
- Use of homographs and homophones- wind/wind- 'different'- Wright/right
- Listening to reading English news, songs and other activities
- Listening to biographies, poems, dramas, stories
- Tongue twister (e.g. around the rugged rock the ragged the rascal ran. She sells

- sea shells on the sea shore...)
- Self-correction through listening to recording of own speech
- Through phonetic transcription

Dealing with homework

Although homework is compulsory and necessary in most of the educational intuitions, many students do not like to do it. Some reasons for not doing homework may be lack of interest, time, textbooks, exercise books, etc. Similarly; some students do not do homework due to difficulty, easiness, and fear of overcorrection.

Some useful tips for getting students to do homework

- Provide options. (Asking same linguistic aspects i.e. vocab and structure either through letter, essay, or through dialogue. - 'A trip to Srinagar')
- Facilitate whole class together. (provide a model and all students follow him.)
- Correct one type of error at a time. (I.e. agreement, punctuation, spelling.)
- Give different but appropriate homework. (Divide the class in to 3 groups: A- B -C and give them free, guided and control writing respectively)
- Provide the students freedom to limit the volume of the homework. (Write a paragraph on any of the topics .e.g. a- - b c- .)
- Give variation in homework. (e.g. Group A-writing ,B- reading, C- research work)
- Provide flexible time limit. (Complete it tomorrow or within 5 days.)
- Reduce overload homework. (Give only 2 or 3 pages at a day.)

- Interact with parents. (Ask parents for the completion of homework.)

Conclusion

Aforementioned challenges and the ways of dealing with them can be a milestone to the teachers who have been teaching English and other subjects in English since many schools have followed content-based syllable where all subjects except Nepali is taught in English. If one enters the classroom, s/he should have the knowledge of these basic skills of teaching techniques that must be applied in day to day teaching and learning activities.

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