

MODERN APPROACHES AND METHODS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Annotation: This article will take a closer look at four fresh teaching strategies that are grand slam with students. While traditional methodologies such as the audio-lingual and direct methods still offer useful elements, they're clearly outdated in the modern classroom. The communicative approach, which was in vogue in the late '90s, is still widely considered as the latest advancement in modern language teaching. Most TESOL/TEFL training programs still live and swear by it. However, it has become clearly evident that the needs of modern students have outpaced teachers' and book publishers' best strategies.

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Traditional curriculum design and class planning revolved around the topics considered useful for students. This meant students were to learn the grammar and vocabulary that educators thought students needed to know. Student input was minimal to say the least. What we learned from this is why it's imperative to build lesson plans around activities that all students can feel comfortable with and relate to. The task-based approach represents a significant paradigm shift since the focus on content has shifted to skills and competencies. So, planning and design aren't about what's taught, but why it's taught. This approach isolates individual skills and competencies in order to teach material students actually need to know to meet their goals and objectives. Sample tasks could be ordering in a restaurant, booking a hotel room, or perhaps more advanced tasks like critiquing a movie or voicing their opinions about politics. In this approach, the language taught revolves around the task itself, not the other way around. For this method to work, teachers must understand their students' needs and expectations in order to design lessons that help their students succeed. Grammar, vocabulary and language skills are just the vehicles that enable students to achieve their final outcomes. Before adopting the task-based approach, educators must ask themselves, "Why are my students learning English?" Educators must then look at ways to help their learners achieve their personal and/or professional goals. The answers to these questions will help create a program that's relevant to your students. Much like the task-based approach, the project-based approach is meant to address students' real needs by adapting language to the skills and competencies they truly need personally and/or professionally. The application of this approach begins by determining the one, global objective that the individual or group of students have.

For example, if you're teaching a business English class, you should look at why students are in the class to begin with and plan accordingly. One time when working for a corporate client, I taught a room full of accountants who were all vying for promotions up for grabs in their company. Naturally, I taught them differently than I would students interested in learning casual English conversations because of the nature of their jobs. They had to produce specific monthly reports in English for multiple departments in their office. So, we broke one sample report into sections and analyzed each segment. Each student prepared the sections as if they were the real thing. In class, discussed the difficulties my students encountered, in addition to covering all the vocabulary and grammar needed to complete each section. Their final project was a finished report they could submit to their boss for approval, and the criteria we used to create the report was based their company handbook. It was a lot of work, but we had fun with it. But what if you have a class full of teenagers who don't want to be in class to begin with? Start by doing a needs assessment, looking at what they're interested in and what topics they really need to know.

This assessment will lead to the design of one overarching project that will become the end result of the class, term or course. This project can be anything from an oral presentation to a large-scale production such as a class play. Whatever the case, the project must be comprised of individual tasks that lead students to the goals in the assessment. Think of the project as their final, comprehensive assessment. Whereas small tests or the

completion of individual tasks are cumulative assessments. Just remember, your evaluation criteria must be clear so students know what they're being graded on.

While the previous two approaches focus heavily on the skills and competencies that students need to develop, this approach focuses on what language students actually need to produce. In particular, the actual words that students need to understand in order to conduct specific tasks. This approach is based upon the core language that students need to know given their needs. Again, professional students need very specific vocabulary pertaining to their field. For instance, "profit" is an essential term for business students, much the same way "scalpel" is to medical students. Moreover, any other language taught outside of this core language is meant to be supplementary and intended to enable students' communication within their respective fields. Topics such as movies and hobbies may take a back seat to things like booking a hotel or describing work experience. Nevertheless, there are common skills in all fields, such as saying your name or providing personal information.

Since this approach focuses on content, tasks and homework assignments should focus on students' true needs. Therefore, assessment should be based upon what students actually achieved. Examples of these assessments include writing an email for a job application or arranging a time for an interview. This approach requires teachers to understand what students really need right away, focus on that, and then expand students' horizons as their communication skills develop. The good news is that there's quite a bit of research on this topic, leading to word lists teachers can focus on. Since these lists can be quite long, it's good to categorize them into sections like "weather and seasons" so lessons can focus on this specific vocabulary. For beginners, 10 words would make for a great lesson.

Activities can range from matching pictures and definitions to working with dialogues. An advanced twist could be to describe their favorite seasons, or even speculate about what they could do in the summer or winter. The sky truly is the limit.

While traditional approaches do provide a solid foundation for effective language teaching, it's important to understand that these techniques don't always address students' current needs. In fact, the communicative approach, still widely preached as the latest and greatest approach, is already due for a makeover of its own.

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