

Investigating Learner Centered Approach towards teaching of Effective Communication skills: An ‘adaptable’ methodology for Management Education

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Abstract

A long discussed, long researched domain in the field of Education in general and ‘English Language Teaching’ in particular has perhaps remained unanswered, that is, how to make teaching a language ‘interesting’ and how to become an ‘innovative facilitator’ rather than a ‘teacher’? In order to answer this question the outcome of the whole activity called ‘teaching-learning’ needs to be addressed.

The present paper attempts to suggest certain ‘creative’, ‘adaptable’ and ‘flexible’ teaching methodologies for Management Education in West Bengal, India to highlight that there is now a need for a ‘paradigm shift’ in the way learners are taught.

The paper begins with several background information about this area and then proceeds towards various types of ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘fun-filled’ teaching techniques along with ‘case study’ justifications.

The paper finally concludes with recommendation that the focus of teaching and learning should now be on ‘learner-teacher’ and not on ‘teacher-learner’ relationship. Students must be taught not in the literal sense of the term ‘teaching’ but they need to be ‘facilitated’ always to learn by themselves especially when being dealt with the Management students.

Keywords: Interesting, Innovative, Facilitator, Flexible, Adaptable, Fun-filled, Learner-Teacher, Creative.

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Introduction:

Several psychologists and educationists have lead different studies in this quest of finding out the interesting methods for teaching. The question of how to make language teaching ‘interesting’ and how to become an ‘innovative facilitator’ rather than a ‘teacher’ has remained a long discussed and long researched domain.

The primary goal of a teacher traditionally was to ensure that the students are taught the subjects that are prescribed for each class. Many teachers, along with this set of goal, understand that they have another long target of molding the career and future of the student. This perceived role of a teacher is what actually helps them to put in that extra effort in teaching and helping the student develop their intellectual abilities. Apart from this, there can be other short term goals like, helping the student achieve the required success in the examinations. However all these perceived and set of goals are weighed differently by different teachers according to their level of interest and passion towards this Management profession. The point is that it is these goals and the means to achieve them that can be considered as the ways to make teaching interesting and to become an interesting teacher. But in many cases, though the teachers aspire for higher goals, the means to achieve them is unclear. Many teachers try to bring in different styles of teaching and also try to control, coax and cajole the students to be attentive in the class. But again the problem is that, the results may not be very impressive. The long term learning part is also a matter under question. All these mean that there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way students are “taught”.

Most educational theories were developed exclusively to educate students whether child or adult. The prominent question in the field of ‘language learning’ in particular and education in general is whether we need to believe a continuum ranging from ‘teacher-driven’ to ‘student-driven’ learning or a ‘new’ shift in the structure that would be wholly ‘student-directed’ learning depending on the ‘learner’ characteristics learning settings, constraints on time and several other factors before finally choosing the ‘flexible’ methodology.

Background:

Every generation, according to Zemke (2000) has specific specific preferences for the arrangement of the learning environment, type of instruction and learning activities. The generations have been called traditionalists (those born between 1920-1944), Baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1960), Gen Xers (those born between 1961 to 1980), Milleniums or Nexters (those born after 1980). A traditional training room with a stable, orderly learning environment was preferred by the ‘traditionalists’.

Baby boomers respond well to interactive training /teaching activities-they like group activities. They like well organized training materials which are easy to access. Compared to other groups, they are especially motivated to learn if they believe training content will benefit them personally.

Gen Xers prefer a self-directed learning environment. They respond best to training methods that allow them to work at their own pace: videos, CD –ROMs and web based training.

Nexters prefer a learning environment that includes team work and technology. They like to learn by both working alone and helping others. Nexters (like Gen Xers) prefer entertaining training activities. Training needs to be interactive and enthusiastic.

It is clearly evident from the above discussion that the present generation needs a pleasure–filled, entertaining teaching and training methodology which will also be giving the necessary information along with usage of latest technology. This also means a radical shift of focus from the teacher to the learner. But the interesting fact is that we are living in an era of different generations, in which the teacher belongs to Baby boomers or GenXer and the student belongs to Nexter! Is that why, we face so much of problems in the teaching-learning environment? Considering all the above factors, it is now imperative that the traditional teaching methodologies used in technical and management education needs a thorough revamping. This shift although happening in many places, needs to be extended to become an inbuilt teaching

methodology. The following areas of changes are identified which will cater to the need of the hour.

A. From Teacher Centered to Learner Centered

The teaching –learning process should now focus more on the student and get more involvement and participation. The methodology used should be interesting and appealing to them. Students should learn by their experience.

B. From Subject orientation to Personal development orientation

The focus of teaching and learning should now be on the total personal development which includes behavioural skills, values and attitudes of the student along with the subject knowledge. For this, the teaching methodology should also help the student gain the necessary behavioural and personality skills apart from the subject knowledge gained in the process. Daniel Goleman , the famous psychologist , who write the book “Emotional Intelligence” says that emotional skills needs to be incorporated in the school and college education.

C. From Teaching to Facilitation

The age old concept of the teacher, who teaches with the help of a board and chalk, now, must be shifted to a role of the teacher in which, the teacher acts as a motivator and a facilitator in the process of learning. Facilitating is helping the student learn and not in the literal sense of “teaching”. Students must be taught, but need not be “taught,” always. They need to be facilitated to learn by themselves. All this requires the teacher to use innovative methods of teaching especially when dealing with technical and management students.

Methodology:

The following different innovative methods have been tried on an experimental basis among various groups of students ranging from first year to final year Management students. The age group of the participants ranges from 21 - 25 years; certain exceptional cases may include 26-30 or more (mainly for career advancement). The methods are listed with an example or an experience or case study.

However, the teachers when adopting these methods should also consider its relevance for use in a particular context. The time required for the activity is also given, which needs to be calculated further, considering a batch size of 60 students (common classroom size in a school or college). In some cases, the activities can be given as an assignment with prior notice, so that the students come well prepared. The benefit of using these techniques is also listed, based on the experience and observation of the experimenter and also by the feedback of the students.

Findings & Analysis:

Through the given ‘methodologies’ and ‘case studies’ underneath about Management education, this present paper tries to analyse learner centered approach towards teaching of English communication skills.

Method 1: “Train the Trainer” - Senior students teach Junior students

<i>Time required</i>	Based on the subject and topic, one to two hours.
<i>Tools required</i>	Facilities for Audio and Video.
<i>Preparation time</i>	Sufficient preparation time must be given based on the capability of the students.
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team work, • Responsibility, • Subject knowledge, • Presentation skills, • Confidence, • Application of skills/subject already learnt.
<i>Flexible Factor</i>	Medium
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Immediate and Direct

Principle:

Many previous researchers found that (Astin, 1993; Simpson & Frost, 1993) involvement and commitment are two important attributes of successful students, and willingness to take responsibility for the future is a third. Involved, committed, and responsible students seem to know where they are going, spend whatever time and energy it takes to achieve their goals, and access the resources they need to help them along their way. Inculcating the values of shouldering responsibility is therefore an important factor for development of the student.

Methodology:

Selected Senior students (E.g.: Second year students) are given a topic for taking a training session for the junior students (E.g.: First year students). The topic and session timings are fixed based on mutual discussions between the teacher and students. The teacher should facilitate and provide the necessary support for the group in the preparation of the content, schedule and others.

Case Study:

The second year MBA students will be asked to prepare and deliver a training session on “Communication skills” to the first year MBA students. The session is planned for two hours. The team size of the trainer team will be sixteen (16). The trainer group will be subdivided into pairs and each pair will be given various sub topics and areas of training delivery. There are several sessions of planning and each aspect of training had to be taken by the students themselves. The teacher’s role is to support when required and provide the overall guidance. On the particular day of the training, a group of junior students (30 in numbers) were given as “trainees”. The trainers then will handle the session for two hours, playing the role of a “trainer” in pairs. After the training session is over, a feedback from the trainees was collected and the program was rated “very good”. A post training analysis will also be done along with the teacher and the students who undertook this assignment. The post training analysis will help the students to understand the nuances behind organizing and conducting a training program. The senior students could understand the difficulties of a teacher and the junior students could become a good listener.

Method 2: Creative Song composition

<i>Time required</i>	5 minutes presentation time per group
<i>Tools required</i>	Paper , Pen
<i>Preparation time</i>	15 minutes for each group
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team work, • Subject knowledge, • Presentation skills, • Creativity, • Aids in better understanding of the subject learnt already, • Decision making
<i>Enthusiastic Factor</i>	High
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Immediate and Indirect

Principle:

According to the results of recent researches using music in the educational process not only makes it livelier, enjoyable but stimulates "right" brain learning. Several years ago one research showed that people listening to Mozart scored better on a standard IQ test. ("Mozart Effect"-studied by Dr. Alfred A. Tomatis). Listening to Mozart also reduces severity of epileptic seizures and Alzheimer's disease. People often use music to relax after exhausting day, to get rid of stress or to prepare for tests. So it is logical to listen to music in order to make students study better. Using famous songs is an efficient method to activate and interest the students. Not just listening to music, but also making them involved in composing music would be a better activity that will trigger the creativity hidden among the peers.

Methodology:

The students are divided into small groups and asked to prepare a song or poem about the subject already taught. This way, the difficult concepts, especially those which are difficult to memorise can be easily learnt by the student. For e.g: Definitions, lists, theories etc can be converted to popular film songs and be presented by the group members themselves. The teacher must conduct this activity without prior information and the activity becomes interesting when it is done spontaneously.

Case Study:

The first year MBA students will be given this activity and they could come up with very interesting songs and poem related to several management principles. The songs were presented by the group members in front of the classmates. The groups will present several topics like definition of Accounting, Fourteen principles of H.Fayol, Functions of managers etc in the form of songs and poems. Some songs were formed on popular film songs, which helped the students to easily memorise their subjects.

Method 3: Role-play

<i>Time required</i>	10- 15 minutes per group
<i>Tools required</i>	Nil (when organized spontaneously otherwise as per the requirements of the team)
<i>Preparation time</i>	Sufficient preparation time must be given based on the capabilities of the group
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team work,• Subject knowledge,• Presentation skills,• Creativity,• Aids in better understanding of the subject learnt already,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision making,• Communication skills,• Confidence
<i>Flexible Factor</i>	High
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Long term and Indirect. In some cases, based on the program, the learning can be direct and immediate also

Principle:

Role-play has been considered as a very effective means of training and teaching in management education. Several previous researches have proved its usefulness in professional and behavioural trainings. However its use has not been fully tapped in technical education. This role-playing when done in tune with TV or similar media programs is much more interesting for the students.

Methodology:

The entire class is divided into smaller groups. Each group is given the task of preparing and presenting a TV show /radio program based on the subject already discussed or taught in the class. Of course, the idea and type of program can be made contemporary or can be original, based on the creativity and decision of the group members. However, each group member must participate in one or the other way while the show is presented before the audience. The topic can be either given by the teacher or asked to voluntarily select. Once the group is given enough time for discussion, they can be asked to present it in front of the remaining classmates. The teacher must provide the rules and regulations for the program with regard to the time slot, the content and the subject coverage. These groups can be evaluated on the basis of their creativity, their communication skills, the content coverage and their presentation.

Case Study:

This activity will be given to the First year MBA Students. They will be asked to present any television show based on any subject that they have learnt. This activity was tried out both as a

spontaneous activity, in which the topic is given and the presentation done during the same session as well as a prepared activity with sufficient preparation time. Both the cases produced excellent results, as the students came up with very interesting and informative “TV Shows” on subjects related to Science, Commerce, English Communication, Management Skills etc. Some of the programme names were “Coffee with Bill Gates”, “Super Salesman-Reality show”, “English For all” etc. Each of these shows was presented within 10-15 minutes and the audience rated the programs based on their content coverage, presentation style, creativity etc.

Method 4: Peer Group –Learning method with Student Teachers

<i>Time required</i>	15-30 minutes per group based on the topic
<i>Tools required</i>	Nil
<i>Preparation time</i>	Sufficient preparation time must be given. Topics must be allotted sufficiently advance
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject knowledge, • Presentation skills, • Communication skills, • Confidence, • Responsibility , • Listening skills, • Interest towards the subject, • Understands the subject better
<i>Enthusiastic Factor</i>	Medium
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Immediate and direct

Principle:

The basic principles of this activity are somewhat the same as that of the “train the trainer” activity, already shown above. This activity also highlights the need for giving more responsibility for the students, which would help to learn themselves, rather than the teacher lecturing the complete subjects.

Methodology:

This method is to be organized prior to the session. The entire class is divided into small groups of 6-8 members each. On a particular day, one group will come prepared with a topic assigned to them at least one week in advance. Then each of the group members is sent to the remaining group and asked to teach the portion to the small group before them. This way the entire groups get one teacher each and the lesson is taught to them by “student teacher”. After giving the necessary time for the student teacher to teach, the teachers are interchanged and each group gets a new teacher. The new teacher asks question to the group and evaluates the group members for their knowledge.

Case Study:

This activity has to be given to a class of Final MBA students for the subject called “Industrial organization and Management”. This method actually helped the students in learning the subject better, especially the theories and other contents related to management. Though the fun factor is mainly because of the different styles of “student teacher”, the other advantage is that each student will get a chance to become the “teacher of the day” and in the process will become more confident and smart.

Method 5: “Sell your product”

<i>Time required</i>	3-5 minutes per group /individual
<i>Tools required</i>	Any product related to the topic/subject
<i>Preparation time</i>	Sufficient preparation time must be given within the same session. Topics can be also allotted sufficiently advance

<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Application of Subject knowledge,• Presentation skills,• Communication skills,• Confidence,• Listening skills,• Interest towards the subject• Creativity,• Research skills,
<i>Fun Factor</i>	High
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Long term and direct

Principle:

“Sale” or “Selling” is a social process which requires extreme communication and convincing skills. It also requires that the sales person is clear and well knowledgeable about the product or service which he is trying to sell. All this means that the salesperson knows the product in and out and is able to answer any question that the prospect is asking.

Methodology:

This method is another innovative teaching –learning process. This is highly useful when learning scientific products or tools. The student can be asked to study the features of the tool that is taught in the class and then they can be divided into small groups. Each group has to make a “Sales presentation “of the product they have learnt.

Case Study:

Some of the final year students of MBA can be given the task of selling a new generation Laptop. The group will make a presentation and demonstration of the features of the laptop.

The group members in turn will learn the features of the laptop and the subject learnt can be connected very well to this practical method. The audience as feedback will ask questions related to purchase decisions and could very well understand the features and the technology behind.

Method 6: Using examples from Animal kingdom

<i>Time required</i>	Based on the content and coverage.
<i>Tools required</i>	Research and reference materials from library , internet , observation method
<i>Preparation time</i>	At least two weeks for each group /individual
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of Subject knowledge, • Presentation skills, • Communication skills, • Confidence, • Interest and higher level thinking of the subject • Creativity , • Research skills, • Observational skills , • Negotiation and Analytic skills
<i>Fun Factor</i>	Medium –High
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Immediate and indirect

Principle:

Giving examples from animal world is yet another innovative method. Every animal can be used as an example for delivering concepts of team work, management theories, leadership theories etc. These examples will help the students to absorb the principles and theories in a simple manner. For Management classes, there can be discussions based on managerial phenomenon and animal behavior for proving or disapproving various management events.

Methodology:

The students can be divided into various groups and given a task of observing a particular animal behavior for some time. About two weeks time could be given after selecting a particular animal. After that, the groups make a presentation of their observations.

Case Study:

This exercise was given to certain groups of MBA Students. One such group can make a presentation on “Management lessons from Ants”. Another group on “Management lessons from Elephant” and the other will present on “Management lessons from Spider” etc.

Method 7: Cartoon Video Analysis / Cartoon Drawing

<i>Time required</i>	5-10 minutes per group/individual
<i>Tools required</i>	Audio and Video facility
<i>Preparation time</i>	15-30 minutes for discussion
<i>Benefits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of Subject knowledge, • Presentation skills, • Communication skills, • Confidence, • Interest and higher level of thinking of the subject • Creativity , • Observational skills
<i>Fun Factor</i>	High
<i>Knowledge Transfer</i>	Immediate and indirect

Principle:

Cartoons are a very interesting and fun filled method for teaching scientific concepts and in some cases management concepts. There are many cartoon characters like Tom & Jerry, Mr. Bean, Chota Bheem, which bring out many scientific principles and management principles in a lighter vein. It has also been proved that using cartoons for teaching helps in not just making the session interesting, but also better understandable for the students.

Methodology:

Cartoons can be used as a tool for explaining certain aspects by the teacher himself/herself. Alternately, after showing a cartoon picture or video, the students can be divided into small groups and asked to discuss the aspects expected and present. The video may need to be played twice or thrice, as the students may or may not be able to grasp the details in the first view. But a second or third view will help them analytically think and present. Another version of this method is that the students themselves can be divided into small groups and each group can be given the task of developing a good cartoon picture /video relevant to the subject and explain why they made that, the relevance and subject learnt out of it.

Case study:

The first year MBA students were divided into small groups of 4-5 members and were asked to draw a cartoon showing any management or organizational principle. The groups were given around 1 hour of time for discussing and drawing the cartoons. In some cases, since the group members were not confident of drawing, they were given the liberty of cutting and pasting pictures from newspapers if required.

Conclusion:

This paper is an attempt to introduce various original, enjoyable and “adaptable” teaching methods for Management education. Technical education in general and Management education in particular which has been long considered as one that can only be taught using the “chalk and talk” method, can now become more interesting and activity oriented instruction.

Management education try to incorporate many of these factors like student participation and responsibility sharing, however, the “pleasurable factor” may be missing in many of the methods. This paper tried to introduce certain methods which are fun filled and at the same time “knowledge filled”, i.e. ensuring of knowledge enhancement transfer among the peer. In today’s world, where information is available freely at the click of a button, the role of a teacher becomes less significant, unless necessary poignant and affecting aspects are built in the method of teaching and learning. This “human touch” is what that is going to be the most important

factor in teaching and learning. Gone are the days when teachers were very strict and carrying a cane to classroom lectured for an hour. Today, teachers are expected to be friendly and create a fun filled atmosphere for learning.

This paper is also an attempt to make all the teachers understand the necessity of improving their “facilitating” skills through creative methods. We can therefore say thinking creatively is an important skill for a teacher.

To conclude: “*Creativity is contagious. Pass it on.*” — Albert Einstein.

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