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Modern Pedagogical Language Learning Strategies for the Weak Learners

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Abstract

The word 'teacher' represents knowledge - transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the taught. In fact, the foundation that builds a person is to great extent based on the knowledge he gets from his teacher. If there is somebody other than our parents who plays an important role in our mental development, it's our teachers. A good teacher doesn't mean he/she teaches well, but can make students know they can learn well. To make students interested in their learning, first a teacher should make them aware of what they are capable for. Teaching is a procedure that intimately involves both the students and teacher together. This profession needs sincerity, creativity, dedication and imagination that require to take teaching to heart and to care about each problem. The more a teacher thinks about a student, more he/she gets the solution. Being a teacher, one should try to understand problem area; problems among students can vary to friends, family or on personal condition. Psychological analysis gives a reason why a student is not learning and helps finding a solution. It is important to help teachers to make self-improvement. Teachers should think out various ways and try them out in teaching, as it will help to make the class more interesting and create more chances for us to improve the teaching. Teachers should also try to find if there are any physical or mental problems with weak students. For example, if a student is unable to write something from board or to comprehend with the speaker, he may have some physiological, psychological, environmental, linguistics, and content barriers. Some students may also suffer from interpretation problems which make them unable to cope with all students of the class. Here comes the main duty of teachers to find problems first and then treat students accordingly. The teacher of the present time should be open to the world, learn about what happens therein and follow up the new developments in the field of competence; otherwise, he falls prey to cognitive illiteracy.

The paper explains what I meant by comparatively weak students and outlines the problems that creates barrier in comprehension in teaching them. By helping the weak students I believe in creating a friendly, well-disciplined and united class atmosphere

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which would definitely help these specific students become more confident and take more initiative as well as responsibility for their study. A teacher must appreciate weak students even if they get little achievement and give them confidence that theycan do the best like other classmates. Helping them in their weak areas (concepts of grammar) and giving little more importance to their practice for grammar, paraphrasing, paragraph writing, not only help him realize the importance of sentence construction but also make sure they must not feel it like a burden or pressure. A variety of methods are employed and evaluated. They have been validated through meetings, personal interaction, questionnaires, interviews, and students' actions and self-evaluations.

Keywords: Innovative teaching methods, Weak students, Grammar practice, Sentence construction, Listening, Speaking, Activities, Teaching and learning.

Many students have memory problems. The students who have deficits in registering information in short-term memory often have difficulty in remembering instructions or directions they have just been given;what was just said during conversations and class lectures and discussions, and what they just read. Students who have difficulty with working memory often forget what they are doing while doing it. The students who are weak in English language they do not achievean expected level of English because they have very limited vocabulary; they cannot read even simple words correctly, they can understand very little of language, they cannot speak out a complete sentence without making mistakes, and they are at a loss in the basic grammar they have learned in junior middle school. In helping these students, I want to make them more confident, show more initiative and become more motivated in their learning. For the teacher, it is must that he should first try to be a friend to the weak student. When a friendship is built, student starts loving his teacher and after that he obeys whatever his teacher says. Here mystery of student's success lies in understanding and friendship between teacher and the student. To help to create a friendly, well-disciplined and a united class atmosphere, in which I believe it is good for students to study. This would not only help the students to be more confident with them but also helps the students have more initiative and self-responsibility for their study. Each student, whether of poor achievement or not, has his/her own sense of identity. They may be slow in their learning for a variety of reasons therefore the teaching methods used to help these students should also be varied. Teachers always find it difficult to deal with slow learners. Often teachers try to advise such students and get results by negative enforcement like punishment. But it is not the right solution. Teachers should give time to think over such students to get a better solution. Following guidelines will help teachers to improve slow learners:

1. Group Work

It is a universal phenomenon that the students are filled with anxiety and worry and feel insecure in learning the second language. Group work can be useful for them in various ways. The groups can be made of mixed levels or similar ones. The hope is that in a smaller group, the weaker student will feel more able to contribute. Also, if

the group works with a set of information, divide the information between the students, forcing them to work together. Division of class into groups can be done for the whole lesson that enables the teacher to give a different level or number of tasks to each group. Discussion of this strategy with the class can help prevent stigmatization.

According to my own observation, the poorer a student is in second/foreign language, the less sense of security he has. In my teaching I found that one of the main reasons that students do not want to act voluntarily in the class is because they are afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by others. Some weak learners also have a problem that they forget what they learn. That's why such students lose confidence and they start differentiating themselves from good students. Teacher's duty here is to give them tips on how to recall and how to write correctly. In this method, students can compare their answers in pairs or in small groups. The teacher then collects the information and prepares a statistical representation of the key questions and answers. This will help to develop the sense of shared interest in the class.

Good and strong students in class do not like to sit with weak students. This is another cause for no improvement in weak students. Teachers should prepare seating arrangements properly to let weak students sit with strong ones. Teachers can also ask strong students to help their weak fellows. It can be done as follows:

(i) Work groupings: Varying the way students work in the class that helps meet the variety of levels in the class.

(ii) Pair works: Pair with strong students with strong, weak students with weak or strong with weak can be made. In a very controlled activity, the strong students with weak students work well. In a freer activity, strong with strong will be of benefit. Variety in the pairings is the key here - and the teacher should be sensitive to the general relationships between different students, and learn to note who works well with whom.

(iii) Whole class/ Mingles: A mingles activity involves students talking or interacting with many different members of the class in a short period of time in order to achieve a task. This means that any one student will work with students at different levels - experiencing stronger and weaker levels of communication. This supports the weaker students and provides opportunities for the stronger ones. Mingles can take many forms – students may have to find the person who has a matching word to theirs, or the second half of a split sentence. The students may all have the same or different questions, or a mixture. The key is the general principle of an information gap or communicative need.

2. Initiative Learning

Often weak students do not understand the lesson clearly.Such students should be taught individually according to their understanding level. Teaching of English requires encouragement from the teacher to help students discover by themselves the way of language learning. Strong learning skills and positive work habits are often indicators of future success in school, home, and in life in general. As a result of teacher-centered teaching, most of the students were very dependent in their learning. Students

got answers easily from the teacher or from other students, and then they easily left them behind. Everything seemed to be becoming clearer in the class, but everything seemed to be confusing after class. Teacher should consider how well the students act upon new ideas and opportunities. For better learning the students should:

(i) demonstrate a willingness to take risks, demonstrate curiosity and interest in learning;

(ii) approach new tasks with a positive attitude and recognize and advocate appropriately for the rights of self and others;

(iii) help their fellow learners to take more initiativesand try to work out their own questions;

(iv) try to solve the questions by themselves before the teacher discusses the 'best' answers in the class.

3. Discussion and Analysis

It is easy for students to get frustrated in a class of mixed ability groups. Stronger students may feel held back, weaker students may feel pressured. The teacher may feel stressed. The best solution to this situation is to have an open-class discussion about the classroom situation – to ensure the best for everyone. It is probably best to stage and structure the discussion. Use a needs analysis to prompt the students to reflect upon their learning style, learning strategies, language needs, learning enjoyment, motivation, language strengths and weaknesses. Questions that might be included are: What kinds of class activities do you enjoy / benefit from? Which language skill do you most wish to develop? Do you prefer working individually or with a partner? Would you rather sit and listen to the teacher all lesson or participate in group work?

4. Encouragement

Encouragement plays an important role in the success of a child. Teachers should find out strengths of weak students and applaud them with encouraging words. If a student is given confidence, he will feel his importance and worth. Making mistakes doesn't mean stupidity; it shows the learning process. Once confidence level of weak students increases, improvement takes place. A teacher should pay attention to every little progress of each student, especially towards those who are slow learners. Appreciation plays a very important role for hard work and progress. It can be oral or written. As the marks obtained in examinations are taken in high esteem, students become more active if marks are given in practice exercises. Classroom practice enables students to learn on regular basis. Weak students are identified easily and they are given opportunities to seek the ways of improvement. Jean McNiff truly remarks: As each tree of a different height has its own right to grow, students also should be treated according to their individual abilities and their own characteristics; they should be treated as individuals.

5. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based learning focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks such as visiting the doctor or a telephone call. This method is very encouraging

and helps the teaching to be student-centred. TBLT has many characteristics like – students are encouraged to use language creatively and spontaneously through tasks and problem solving; they focus on a relationship that is comparable to real world activities. The conveyance of some sort of meaning is central to this method. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome.

6. Innovative Teaching Approaches

Teachers should give concrete examples before proceeding to abstract concepts by way of simple and easy steps at a pace in line with the learning abilities of students. Teachers may teach new concepts from different perspectives by various approaches so that students can grasp the ideas through meaningful and repeated illustrations. Teachers should encourage students' active participation by more frequent use of teaching aids, games and activities. They can also make use of information technology and all the teaching resources available to help students understand the main points.

7. Emotional Teaching

A prominent foreign language teaching expert Wang Hongda in a workshop at Chicago remarks that emotion is of the same importance as that of the skills of learning in foreign language teaching. The cohesion of the teacher will be of great help for students' learning, especially for the poor students to improve their level. Teachers always give importance to strong students in classroom. But it is necessary that a teacher should go to weak students and ask them personally whether they have understood the lesson. Teacher's asking approach should be polite and not rude. This fact can't be avoided that students comparatively poor at English learning come from very poor and backward rural areas. In order to make students do what a teacher wants them to do, there must be trust and willingness for an active learning atmosphere. Persuade a weak student to make a time table for study. Sometimes students do not have a specific goal regarding their education. Teachers should observe such students and inspire them to fix a goal for study and life as well. Help such student to make a time table so that s/he can do everything on right time. Many teaching experts believe that a harmonious and friendly relationship is of great importance to motivate students especially those who are comparatively poor. It helps them to learn in a relaxed environment.

8. Teaching Activities/Aids and Supporting Materials

Teachers should design appropriate learning activities in line with the focus of teaching. On the basis of low starting point, small steps, diversified activities and instant feedback, teachers should encourage students to participate actively during the learning process to help master the skills and methods of collaborative learning. Diversified teaching activities such as situational teaching, competitions, collation of information, discussion, oral reporting, games, topical research, production of graphs/figures/models, role play, recording, visit and experiments may help students enhance their interest in learning. Teachers should exercise their discretion in the appropriate use of teaching aids. Appropriate teaching aids not only help to enhance students' interest in learning,

but also consolidate the knowledge they learned, thus achieving the objective of teaching. Common teaching aids are concrete objects, figures, models, word cards, number cards and audio-visual equipment such as tape recorder, headset, wire free induction loop system and multimedia teaching aids, etc. When designing and using teaching aids, teachers should first consider their practical use and assess whether the aim of remedial teaching can be attained.

9. Student Self-Awareness skill

Self-awareness helps an individual to tune into their feelings as well as to the behaviour and feelings of others. Students should be encouraged to develop an awareness of their own language abilities and learning needs. What are their strengths and weaknesses, and how can they focus on these or how can they measure their own progress? This may take the form of a learners' diary, regular self-assessment, keeping records of mistakes, keeping records of things learnt. Self-awareness is the capacity to recognize one's own feelings, behaviour, and characteristics to understand one's cognitive, physical and emotional self. Private and public self-awareness are two kinds of self-awareness that work together to help students understand that what they think and feel. How they see themselves might not always be the way others see them. When students have good self-awareness skills, they would recognize their strengths and weaknesses. They can identify what they need to do to complete a task. They can recognize errors in their writings and edit or change. They can understand and talk about their feelings. They can recognize others' needs and feelings.They can see how their behaviour affects others.

10. Grammar and Listening Comprehension

Students should follow a comprehensive development-programme in language learning, which consists not only of grammar, words and expressions but also their speaking and listening abilities. Grammar helps in sentence construction which provides students with the framework for the clear written expression of various ideas. Students will understand the benefits of writing with correct punctuation. Sentences always begin with a capital letter and end in a full stop, exclamation or question mark.

Listening skills are also important that should be taught in an interesting and effective way that should not only be limited to the classroom but also in a normal conversation. Students should be taught as how to give undivided attention to a person with whom a conversation takes place.

11. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Multiple Intelligence theory encompasses a wide variety of teaching strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. Gardner's theory suggests that no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times, and thus he suggests that instructors shift their intelligence emphasis from lesson to lesson. Below is a summary of eight ways of teaching, followed by a list of specific teaching strategies. Further ideas can also be accessed in the MI Activity Centres section.

Intelligence	Teaching Activities	Teaching Materials	Instructional Strategies
Verbal/ Linguistic	lectures, discussions, word games, storytelling, journal writing	books, tape recorders, computers, stamp sets, books on tape	read about it, write about it, talk about it, listen to it
Logical-Mathematical	brain teasers, problem solving, science experiments, mental calculation number games, critical thinking	calculators maths manipulative, science equipment, maths games	quantify it, think critically about it, put it in a logical framework, experiment with it
Visual/ Spatial	visual presentations, art activities, imagination games, mind-mapping, metaphors, visualisation	graphs, maps, video, LEGO sets, art materials, optical illusions, cameras, picture library	see it, draw it, visualise it, colour it, mind-map it
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	hands-on learning, drama, dance, sports, tactile activities, relaxation exercises	building tools, clay, sports equipment, manipulative, tactile learning resources	build it, act it out, touch it, get a "gut feeling" of it, dance it
Musical	rhythmic learning, rapping, using songs that teach	tape recorder, music collection, musical instruments	sing it, rap it, listen to it
Interpersonal	cooperative learning, peer tutoring, community involvement, social gatherings, simulations	board games, part supplies, props for role plays	teach it, collaborate on it, interact with respect to it
Intrapersonal	individualised instruction, independent study, options in course of study, self-esteem building	self-checking materials, journals, materials for projects	connect it to your personal life, make choices with regard to it, reflect on it
Naturalist	nature study, ecological awareness, care of animals	plants, animals, naturalists' tools (e.g. binoculars), gardening tools	connect it to living things and natural phenomena

12. Assessment and Record on Learning

Assessment plays a very important role in teaching and learning. By means of assessment, remedial teachers can know the learning progress as well as strengths and weaknesses of students; hence, they may design different teaching activities accordingly to help students learn in an effective manner. The two most common assessment methods are listed as follows for teachers' reference:

(i) **Formative Assessment –** Teachers can understand and assess the learning abilities of students from their daily class-work and homework as well as individual or group projects, such as model making, drawing, information collection, measuring activities and the way they relate daily events to the topics they learnt in class, so that they can revise the teaching content accordingly.

(ii) **Summative Assessment –** With reference to the progress of teaching, teachers may assess the performance of students by means of examinations/ tests. The examination/test papers must cover all the main points in teaching where the levels of difficulty meet the students' abilities. The weighting of questions and marks should be balanced.

The use of innovative methods in educational institutions has the potential not only to improve education, but also to empower people, strengthen governance and galvanize the effort to achieve the human development goal for the country. Undoubtedly, the teacher plays a fundamental and central role in the life of the student. He provides him with scientific approach, knowledge, morals, behaviour, belief and ambition as he spends together almost eight hours a day full of activities, vitality and vigour. These hours are longer than those the student spends with his parents and relatives. These mentioned modern methodologies are also more effective in encouraging students to communicate and in creating a positive attitude to the subject which is the most important aspects of student's education.

13. Word Games

The most important part of any language is the vocabulary. To understand the meaning of the words and to use them in day to day life is a very difficult task and games can help the students overcome this difficulty. Games like scrabble, housie etc. have been designed for this specific purpose. These games are just based on words and help the students develop their vocabulary. In addition to these, very simple games can be played to help improve the word database of the students such as simple dictation competitions, synonym competitions, words puzzles, anagrams and hangman. All these games are very addictive and help a lot in improving vocabulary as whenever the student hears a new word the first question that comes up is -what is its meaning?and in this way the vocabulary enriches.

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