

Incorporating New Technologies in Teaching Paragraph Writing for Medical Doctors

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Abstract— In this technology driven age, language teachers like in many other fields are more or less incorporating new technologies in their classrooms. A quick review of the well-known methods of language teaching shows a fertile land to make good use of new technologies in developing and improving learners' main skills. In a course designed to teach English for doctors, the classroom is rarely sufficient to achieve all the course objectives. This is partly due to the problem of time inconvenience usually associated with this kind of learners. Recourse to new technologies here could be a good remedy to overcome this limitation. Within a theme based approach new technologies' tools and techniques are used to improve learner's writing skills. This includes some in and out of class activities aiming to teach doctors how to write a paragraph in English.

Keywords— paragraph writing, new technologies, Theme based approach, English for Doctors

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing demand of patients to move abroad for medical treatment, writing medical reports in English by local doctors is more and more needed. It's also a valuable skill for those doctors who want to work for international companies in Algeria or overseas. Last but not least, attending and contributing in research and international seminars make this skill more significant. For many doctors, learning English is a big challenge despite the cognitive abilities that allowed success in their studies. Part of this problem might be related to the time inconvenience and the lack of special courses taking into account their interests and needs. Their long immersion in French language has added another psychological effect on this challenge.

However, methods in language teaching give many alternatives for teachers and course designers to account for all learning situations and learners including doctors. Moreover, advances in information and communicative technologies (ICT), has brought additional help to overcome most of the challenges.

For this purpose, a special course is designed for doctors tried to incorporate and benefit from ICT in teaching. This course aimed to find a combination that takes into account the learners, needs and the techniques that best serve the objective of teaching paragraph writing in English ;

II. Overview of Approaches and Methods

Methods of language teaching were accounted for by many linguists. They were analyzed from different points of view. Among them was whether and how methods taught the four skills.

Grammar translation method adopted at the close of the nineteenth century focused mainly on reading and writing because "the teaching of modern foreign languages was heavily influenced by the more established and prestigious academic study of the dead classical languages, Latin and Greek." [2] (p.32)

At the same time, a reform movement led by Vietor, Sweet and others believed that "the spoken language is primary and that this should be reflected in an oral-based methodology...These natural language learning principles provided the foundation of what came to be known as the direct method introduced in France, Germany and became widely known in the USA". [8] (p.10-12)

The audio-lingual method developed in the USA "arose out of a behaviorist psychology, which held that learning took place in a stimulus- response- feedback pattern and that repetition and habits forming were crucial to acquisition" [7] (p.70)

In the 1970's and 1980's a paradigm shift was introduced by the communicative movements. As stated by Cook, (2003) "language learning success is to be assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar and pronunciation for their own sake nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but by the ability to do things with the language appropriately, fluently and effectively." [2] (p.36)

In task based method for instance, even if it considers spoken interaction as the 'central focus' of language and the 'key stone' of language acquisition, it explicitly states that "language use involves integration of skills. Task based language teaching assumes a holistic view of language. One where language use draws on different skills being used together." [8] (p.180)

In content based approach also, the theory adopted considers that "language use draws on integrated skills. It views language use as involving several skills together. In a content based class, students are often involved in activities that link the

skills because this how the skills are generally involved in the out of classroom world. Hence students might read and take notes, listen and write a summary.” [8] (p.121)

The historical account realized by Richards (2014) didn’t favour one given method over the others nor did suggest that the new methods are more efficient that the oldest ones. It simply recognizes that the contexts and the objectives were different enough to account for such diversity. As stated by the authors “these approaches and methods are presented not as prescriptions for best practice but rather as a source for reflective review of the teachers’ own core principles, theoretical understanding, and personal practical knowledge.” [8] (p.358)

III. NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING (ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES)

Steven Higgins concluded in his report Interpreting the evidence from meta-analysis for the impact of digital technology on learning that “ There is no doubt that technology engages and motivates young people. However this benefit is only an advantage for learning if the activity is effectively aligned with what is to be learned. It is therefore the pedagogy of use of technology which is important: the how rather than the what.” [4]

Beyond the classroom “The main advantage ,of using new technologies, is that learners can access to the source material in their own time, work through the material at their own pace, choosing topics and subject areas to much their own interests and do all this without necessarily having to interact with a teacher.” [3] (p. 204) the author adds later that “The use of the devices is most successful where it is integrated with the classroom courses, and the learning activities are consistent in the methodology with those of the classroom courses. They appear to be particularly successful with lower level students on extensive courses who need support with some of the more mechanical aspects of language learning, such as learning grammar and vocabulary” [3] (p.208)

In the other hand Krikman(2018) accounted for criticisms of technologies used in the classroom like:

- A lot of time and resources being invested into technologies and applications
- Maintaining technology is costly particularly as systems can quickly become out of date.
- Cyber-bullying : access to illegal materials and distractions from learning. [6]

IV. ADULT LEARNERS’ CHARACTERISTICS

Years after leaving the school, many adults chose to come back studying languages for various reasons. Brown 1984 provided some characteristics of the adult learners that may help and facilitate the process of learning/teaching. He stated that: “Adults, with their more developed abstract thinking ability, are better able to understand a context reduced segments of language. Authenticity and meaningfulness are of course still highly important, but in adult language teaching, a teacher can take more temporary digression to dissect and examine isolated linguistic properties as long as students are returned to the original context. [1]

The table below provides more characteristics of adult learners in comparison with children.

Learner Characteristic	Adults	Children
Conception of Self	Need to validate the information based on their beliefs and values.	Accept the information being presented at face value.
Experience Significant.	ability to serve as knowledgeable resource to the trainer and fellow learners.	Little ability to serve as knowledgeable resource to teacher or fellow students
Orientation to Learning	Have substantial experience upon which to draw. May have fixed viewpoints	Have little or no experience upon which to draw
Readiness to Learn	Decide for themselves what is important to be learned	Rely on others to decide what is important to be learned
Time Perspective	Expect what they are learning to be immediately useful	Expect what they are learning to be useful in their long-term future

Table (Edmunds, Lowe, Murray, & Seymour) [9]

V. Description of the Course

One of the core principles around which content based instruction approach (CBI) are built is stated as follows “people learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means to understanding content, rather than as an end itself.” [8] (p.118)

Accordingly, this course of 20 hours devoted to doctors of different specialties in Touggourt, Algeria is theoretically designed on the basis of a theme based approach which is the ‘weak’ version of CBI. It is a language driven approach where Content is used to learn second Language. Language learning is priory. Content learning is incidental.

The course also adopts a process oriented approach. This approach is, as explained by Holms (1982), ‘realistic in concentrating on strategies and processes of making students aware of their own abilities and potential, and motivating them to tackle the target texts on their own after the end of the course , so that they can continue to improve.’ [5] (p.70)

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Thus, the doctor's patient relationship is chosen as a general theme of the course. It is divided into different subtopics treated in weekly lessons of 45 minutes each. In the same lesson, paragraph writing as the goal of the course is sequenced and learned in integrated sections. As mentioned earlier, and because of the time limitations, the course also uses closed Facebook group. It aims at undertaking some out of class activities related to the topic and the writing skill targeted in the course.

The classroom is equipped with a normal and digital whiteboards. The learners are 10 specialist doctors.

After an introductory session where the goal, objectives and principles of the course were explained, the learners went through a brief diagnosis test including a short paragraph about their story with English. Then the subtopic of appointments with doctors was introduced through a power point short presentation. Later at home, the learners accessed the Facebook closed group in order to start receiving their activities and to prepare for the next session.

In the Facebook group a selected video and article about the topic were posted with instruction to read and listen as many times as possible. Also is posted a list of prepositions in English as one part of speech to be learned.

In the following session a debate will be held about the subtopic. Learners will be encouraged to take notes in addition with those they've already brought with them. Then a prepared imaginary story about appointment in which prepositions are used to help understand their use in context will be read. Then some explanations are given about prepositions if needed.

Lastly, the learners will be given a short overview and vague evaluation about their previous paragraphs. They are then asked to write a short paragraph about how appointment issue may affect the relationship between doctors and patient before presenting the next subtopic and the process goes on.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at benefiting from the new technologies to overcome the time limitation of the English course for doctors. The theme based approach has made possible that writing skill is sought as a main goal, but taught in integration with other skill. A continuing measurement of learners' acquisition of the skill is made stress free by a focus on discussing topics of personal and professional relevance. Being introduced to different parts of speech in context and using new technologies, this course was more motivating for learners to improve their writing skills. Although the study was qualitative but an experimental quantitative replication may enhance our understanding of the benefits of using new technologies in teaching the language in general and the writing skill in particular. It will also help to discover the pitfalls of this use in order to take them into consideration in further courses and studies.