

Incorporating New Technologies in Language Teaching for Medical Purposes

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ملخص

يمكن أن يكون اللجوء إلى التكنولوجيات الجديدة حلاً جيداً للتغلب على إشكالية الوقت. ضمن منهجية قائمة على الموضوع، تُستخدم التقنيات الجديدة لتحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى المتعلمين. وهذا يشمل بعض الأنشطة داخل وخارج القسم في تعليم الإنجليزية للأطباء. الكلمات المفتاحية: نهج قائم على الموضوع، تقنيات حديثة، مهارات الكتابة، اللغة الإنجليزية للأطباء.

Abstract

To overcome the limitations of time inconvenience, recourse to new technologies could be a good remedy. Within a theme-based approach, new technologies, tools and techniques are used to improve learners' writing skills. This includes some in and out of class activities aiming to teach English for medical purposes.

Keywords: Theme-Based Approach, New Technologies, Writing Skill, English for Medical Purposes.

Résumé

Pour surmonter les inconvénients liés au temps, le recours aux nouvelles technologies pourrait être un bon remède. Dans le cadre d'une approche thématique, les nouvelles technologies ont été utilisés pour améliorer les compétences en écriture des apprenants. Cela inclut des activités en classe et en dehors visant à enseigner l'anglais aux médecins.

Mots-clés: approche par thème, nouvelles technologies, compétences en rédaction, anglais pour les médecins.

Introduction

For many doctors, learning English is a big challenge. 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 to 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 trying to incorporate and benefit from ICT in teaching. This course tries to find a combination that takes into account the learners, methods and techniques that best serve the objective of teaching paragraph writing in English.

Overview of teaching 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...” (Cook, 2003, 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". (Richards, 2014, 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..." (McCarthy, 2001, p. 70)

In the 1970's and 1980's a paradigm shift was introduced by the natural and the communicative movements. The difference is that the natural approach was essentially psychological, whereas the focus of Communicative one was primarily social. 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." (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." (Richards, 2014, p. 180)

In content based approach, 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." (Ibid, 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 than 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.” (Ibid, p. 358)

New Technologies in Teaching

Steven Higgins, et al concluded in their 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.” (Higgins, 2018)

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.” (Dudley-Evans, 1998, 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.*” (Ibid, p. 208)

On the other hand, Kirkman 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. (Kirkman, 2018)

Adult Learners

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. In one of them he stated that: *“Adults, with their more developed abstract thinking ability, are better able to understand a context reduced segments of language.”* (Brown, 2017)

The table below provides more characteristics of adult learners.

Table (Edmunds, Lowe, Murray, & Seymour) (Office of the Secretary of States, 2015)

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, are relatively “blank slates”
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
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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.*” (Richards, 2014, p. 118)

Accordingly, this course of 20 hours devoted to doctors of different specialties in Touggourt 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 L2. 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.” (Cited in Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 70)

Thus, the doctor’s patient relationship is chosen as a general topic 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 divided 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 whiteboard. 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 where 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 part of speech.

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 preposition 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.

Limitations of the study

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.

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.

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