

# Innovative Methods to Teach English Vocabulary and Figurative Language to Engineering Students

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**Abstract:** The teaching-learning process has undergone a lot of changes. The teaching-learning process for the subjects like English has also witnessed a remarkable change, especially in the past two decades. Earlier it was limited to the rhetorical ways of teaching: using the blackboard, later it evolved to teaching using the ICT techniques, and today it has gone a step further, where many teachers employ several games and activities. The authors of the current paper aim at accounting some of the innovative practices (games and activities) of teaching English, especially vocabulary development and use of figurative language that they have been using to teach the students taking professional courses. These practices can be easily used in classroom situations as it not just ensures students' learning but also inculcates and fosters interest in the learning process.

**IndexTerms:** Innovative Practices, Vocabulary, Figurative Language, English, Activities

## I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process for the subjects like English has witnessed a remarkable change, especially in the past two decades. Earlier it was limited to the rhetorical ways of teaching: using the blackboard, later it evolved to teaching using the ICT techniques, and today it has gone a step further, where many teachers employ several games and activities. In India teaching English to engineering students or students taking any professional courses is often seen as a challenge. In spite of English being the language used at most of the workplaces in India, often in professional courses, the students give less attention to it over the other specialized: core subjects. And hence, learning English takes a back seat. While students weigh English a little less than other subjects, it gets extremely tough for the teachers to motivate students to learn English. From this situation, germinates the need of introducing innovative teaching methods for the students to learn English.

The innovative methods of learning involve any novel techniques that can be used for the purpose of education. It may range from simulation, role plays, problem-solving, quizzes and competitions etc. It majorly focuses on active learning as opposed to the traditional method of passive learning. It is learning through trial and error technique, doing it rather than simply listening to an expert. Innovative teaching methods provide students with greater experience in dealing with the world of work-related issues they encounter (Nicolaidis, 2012)

It is often noted that students enjoy group tasks over individual tasks; also language has evolved from the need for interaction, alliance, and co-operation. Therefore, it won't be inappropriate to mention that any task that involves interaction and collaboration with the peer- group would be one of the most effective ways of teaching it. With this ideology in mind, the authors of the paper have tried several activities, under innovative teaching methods to teach vocabulary development and cultivate the concept of figurative language in students. These activities can be easily carried out in classrooms. Some of the activities are mentioned in the paper.

### A. Un-scrabble

**Aim:** To strengthen and build the word-power of students

**Ideal Group Size:** Suitable for small as well as large groups

**Duration:** Each set takes 5 minutes.

**Procedure:** The activity is to be conducted between two or more than two teams. In the activity, the letters of the word to be guessed are arranged in indiscriminate order. The students are instructed to arrange the letters in an order that a sensible word should be framed out of it using all the letters. The team that identifies the correct answer first, is to be given the points for that set, also, a few bonus points can be given to the team which gives the correct meaning of the word. Several sets of different words can be repeated and at the end, the final scores can be obtained to identify the winning team.

**Outcome:** The students learn new words, and the retention is better.

### B. Synonym/ Antonym Bingo

**Aim:** To increase the word power of students.

**Ideal Group Size:** 40-50 students

**Duration:** 15- 20 minutes

**Procedure:** In this activity, a 4x4, 5x5 or 9x9 grid on a paper is given, depending upon the availability of time. Larger the grid more is the time required. Each column of the grid has a word written on it. The teacher has a sheet that contains the synonyms for the words with the students. The teacher reads out the synonyms one by one to the students, the students are supposed to encircle the word for which the teacher is giving a synonym. The first one to identify all the

synonyms for the words in the grids wins. Similarly, this activity could be conducted by providing antonyms for the words given in grids.

**Outcome:** This activity enables a better understanding of the words the students are learning, it also helps them know synonyms/antonyms of the words, hence developing the vocabulary further.

#### C. Words in My Praise!

**Aim:** To revisit the adjectives and learn the words that can be used to complement and describe others. Also, this can be useful for students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

**Ideal Group Size:** 40-50

**Duration:** 20 minutes

**Procedure:** The students are divided into groups of 10 each. Two representatives from each group are called in the front and are asked to make a list of adjectives in the teacher's praise, beginning with a specific letter in 2 minutes. The members with a maximum number of adjectives win. Similarly, two new representatives from each group are called and are given a new letter to begin the adjectives with. The other sets are carried out and the team to score maximum points wins.

**Outcome:** This activity introduces the students to a pool of adjectives and its meanings. This enables them to use the adjectives more effectively and efficiently in their speech. Many times it is observed that students find it difficult to understand the subtleties of language, where it becomes difficult for them to differentiate between adjectives like engaging and entertaining. This activity helps in understanding the nitty-gritty of vocabulary building.

#### D. A Voca Box:

**Aim:** To develop a vocabulary.

**Ideal Group Size:** 20- 50 students

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Procedure:** In this activity, the students are divided into teams. Students in each group are asked to drop various words which are high in difficulty level in a box each. After which, a student from each team is called to draw a chit from the opponent's box. If the student is able to use the word aptly in the sentence he/she scores a point. This will be repeated with the other team, so on and so forth, a few sets are conducted, at the end of these sets, the scores are calculated and the winners are identified.

**Outcome:** Knowing various words is not enough, it is also important to understand its meaning and function. This activity will help students to understand the application of the words in the context of other words.

#### E. Word Maker

**Aim:** To orient students in the concept of root words and in the techniques employed in using root words to decipher meanings of the new words formed by the root words.

**Ideal Group Size:** 40-50 students

**Duration:** 15-20 minutes

**Procedure:** This activity needs a prior orientation of students to the concept of root words and how new words can be formed with the help of root words. After the students are oriented about the root words, a list of common root words (eu, loqa, gress, grad, ambus, omus etc) is given to students and they are asked to identify and list down the words that are formed with these root words in English language in an assigned time period. The team which is able to list down a maximum number of correct words wins.

**Outcome:** This activity enables the students to utilize the knowledge of root words to identify the meanings of the words that earlier seemed alien to them. This activity is fruitful for students attempting for competitive examinations.

#### F. Taboo

**Aim:** To help the students learn to exhibit articulation, precision, and clarity in expressing thoughts.

**Ideal Group Size:** 20-30 students

**Duration:** 1 set 5 minutes

**Procedure:** One student from one of the teams is called out and is shown a word; it could be a name of an object, food, place, event, or any adjective etc, which he has to help the other students guess, by describing it. While doing so, he has to ensure he doesn't use the "taboo" words (list of words given to him). For example, if the word to be guessed is *air-conditioner*, the taboo words could be *cool, hot, temperature, electronic gadget*. So the student has to describe the other features of the word without using the taboo words. If his team-mates are able to guess the word, they can be given points, if unable to answer; the opportunity to answer can be given to other teams. After some sets of words are completed, the scores can be compared to identify the winning team.

**Outcome:** This activity will help students avoid jargons, and express the words in simple language. It will also compel them to use synonyms and find alternative words from their word-bank.

#### G. Put Things in Order:

**Aim:** To help the students learn new idioms and phrases.

**Ideal Group Size:** 40

**Duration:** 5 minutes for 1 set. You may extend the activity by adding as many sets of idiomatic expressions as you want your students to learn.

**Procedure:** Students can be split into two teams, and a placard each with a word (one word out of the idiom) is written on it can be given to each student. The students can then be asked to put these placard containing the words together in a

correct order to identify the idiom or phrase that you want your students to know. The activity is timed and the team that finishes first wins. Bonus points can be given if the team members are able to provide with the meaning of the idiom. To maintain the fairness of the task, the idioms for the competing groups could be kept the same and with the new teams, the new idioms could be introduced.

**Outcome:** The activity will help students learn new idiomatic expressions, and will help them retain it for a longer period of time. The nature of activity will also help them develop interpersonal skills.

#### H. Only if you Read

**Aim:** To orient students with figurative language.

**Ideal Group Size:** 20-40 students

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Procedure:** Depending on the number of students, they are divided into groups of 10-12 members per group. Each group is provided with the same list of idioms and phrases. A time period of 15-20 minutes is given to the students to write down the meaning of the idioms and phrases. After which, the teams read out the meanings in front of the other teams and scoring is done. The team to score highest points wins.

**Outcome:** These days' students are into content developing, promoting their products, and presenting ideas on national as well as an international forum, all this entails proper knowledge of the language. This activity will help them build the word power and knowledge of the figurative language.

Though the activities appear interesting and simple, there are several challenges one needs to face while using games and activities for teaching English. Any activity and game require a lot of planning and a proper execution. Many times, due to the novel nature of the tasks, and a lot of focus on student participation, students develop cold feet and do not perform as expected. The teacher needs to identify and take charge of such situations. Sometimes they need to act out what is expected of the students. The success of any activity greatly depends on correct identification of ideal group size and clarity in delivering instructions.

#### II. CONCLUSION

Innovative teaching practices have brought in a paradigm shift and have offered a role reversal to the involvement of students and teachers in the teaching-learning process. With the use of innovative tools, the students not only get an opportunity to learn while they have fun, but it is also benign to their confidence level. It also helps develop inter-personal intelligence and facilitates participatory learning. It has been observed by the authors that the students participated in the activity with immense enthusiasm and it also boosts the student-teacher status-quo. Therefore, the use of games and activities in teaching English yields good results provided the activities are structured and conducted well.

#### III. REFERENCES

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