

Teaching English to the “Millennial Kids” – Rewards and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to delineate the teaching techniques employed by the author to impart English language skills to the Millennial Kids. Children born in the year 2000 turned as Under Graduate students by 2018. These students have been given different names – Net Gen, The Millennials, Generation Y etc. They are worthy of special mention for various reasons, the primary reason being that these students have already been raised in an environment which is English-friendly. It is not an exaggerated statement to make that most of the parents of these students themselves have had solid education in English medium. It has been observed by the author that these students do share a set of parents who have a working knowledge of English themselves. This is where the teacher’s task becomes interesting; how to make the English language classes a very interesting one? How to raise the level of the students to the next level of the language? These students were born into a world of information technology; they prefer to multitask rather than focus on one thing at a time, and they can be more attracted to the ideas of a peer or a web video than what their teachers have to offer. This article is an attempt in sharing the techniques used by the author and presenting a few teaching strategies designed to engage this generation in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: Millennials, Class room techniques, Teaching strategies, English as a Second

Language, Gen.Y.

The Millennial kids who have been privy to an instant transformation in their learning environment is an interesting lot in the classroom. These students have been witness to a very dramatic change in their everyday lives starting with the onset of World Wide Web invading their homes even as toddlers. Their parents have also been a new generation that attached much importance to the growth of their children along with their own personal development. The children were mostly given an English Medium education synonymous with prosperity and advancement in their life styles. The parents themselves were quite comfortable with the usage of English language both in its written and spoken forms. This broadly reflected even in their conversations at home; the children were spoken to both at their native language and the English language. Now that these students have entered the college classrooms as Under Graduate students, a revamp in the teaching methodology seem to be the key to make the English language classes, a very enriching experience. These students find the English language which is being taught as a second language, not a very challenging experience, based on the experience of this author. Most of these students especially the undergraduate stream of B.Sc/B.C.A have been exposed to much better learning experiences during their formative years which includes

examination boards being the CBSE /ICSE. The IGCSE students are yet to enter the undergraduate classes taught by this author. The teaching of the English language thus becomes a very challenging experience to the teacher, while imparting the language to these students who seem to be seeking further information in the class; Furthermore, a section of these students especially in the final Semesters are keen to go to Foreign Universities for their Post Graduation studies and thus are aware of the qualifying examinations like TOEFL, IELTS, GRE which primarily test their knowledge of the English Language. Not just the English language speaking countries like the USA, Australia, The United Kingdom and Canada are insisting on these qualifying examinations but also certain German Universities also insist on these scores for admission. If the foreign shores are not alluring enough, examinations like the CAT and CLAT to enter Management courses and Law schools and to enter the jobs provided by the Public Sector, Railways, Army, Banks, The Civil Services etc., attract this segment. The knowledge of English language is mandatory to clear any of these examinations. These students, who are already armed with the basic usage of language in all its four components pose a real challenge to the English language teacher and it is very rewarding when their needs are met. This paper is an attempt by the author to delineate the teaching methodologies employed by her in the Undergraduate classrooms, primarily to the students hailing from the Urban areas with a better socio-economic factor. All the holistic aspects of language learning, viz., Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening skills are to be taught at a much enhanced level and the following are the methodologies employed effectively by the author:

Reading:

The passages which question the student's ability to comprehend are always a conversation starter, in the English classes. Any leading English language Newspapers help in the process. The teacher carefully chooses the passages based on the difficulty in the comprehending level. As a next step, the Students are always shuffled into smaller groups. The exercise includes finding grammatical errors (if any) in the chosen reading material; to circle the linkers which connect much better than the usual fossilized linkers, used in everyday language. The use of punctuation is always keenly searched for; marking the various components of the language in varied colour pencils has been very effective. For example, Prepositions in Green, Linkers in Red, Adjectives in Blue etc., Verbs in Yellow, add a fun element that leads to an enhanced level of learning. The students who are now in smaller groups comprising not more than 6 numbers are also given a task of quizzing the other group. The quiz is on the factors mentioned above; what are the fossilized errors in the passage? How is the information given in the material? Is it an argumentative passage or a descriptive passage? What is the tense used by the author? How does the information given in the passage progress? Is there a logical conclusion to the passage? Are there any foreign words used? The etymologies of the words are probed as a further exercise. The students are allowed to use their smart phones for the purpose of learning the etymology under the careful supervision of the teacher. When the students are thus involved in the class, the teacher is just a mediator. The teacher invariably becomes a non-existent factor; she is now in the classroom as an observer. Some of the students actually have equipped themselves with a foreign language like French or German, apart from English. Such students assist their

classmates and of course the teacher as well, in learning the etymology. This is a very interesting experience in adding to one's repertoire. Intervention of the teacher only when necessary is the key to the success of the learning experience in this segment.

As far as the literary texts are concerned, the teaching methodology employed by the author does not differ much than the above quoted one. The teacher initially gives the background information of the text. The reading is done by the students themselves; the students are invariably divided into smaller groups. Each group always assists themselves and the other groups. Recording is encouraged in this segment. Reading effectively using proper tone and stressing out the punctuation is always monitored. Brainstorming sessions asking varied questions related to the text are encouraged and an active participation of each student has been noticed by the author. These are termed Jamming sessions and the Millennial Kids enthusiastically take part in these segments.

English pronunciation classes have been taught effectively with the usage of the language lab exclusively available for the students in the college taught by the author. The visual medium and an effective audio make the session a rewarding one. Carefully selected recordings of the native speakers ranging from advanced Western countries like the United States of America, The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada are played in the Language Lab. The recordings include the speakers from the African countries, the Caribbean etc., along with Indian speakers and Asian speakers. The students are thus made to traverse through the varied speakers across the globe. The pronunciation classes thus become a very educative and fruitful session. The Millennial Kids are often accused of being very restless wanting to learn anything and everything at an instant pace; this aspect, if present, is addressed through the effective use of the Language Lab. The Texts which render themselves to be played in the Language Lab is another effective tool. This reinstates whatever has been taught more effectively. Theatre adaptations, Movies, Famous speeches, Documentaries are an example of such texts. The students are made to read along with the rendering of the dialogues wherever possible for an effective learning. This also enhances their effective listening and repeated readings correct their speaking skills as well.

Writing:

Writing skills have always been taught to Indian English students from their earlier learning years. However, rote writing down the notes dictated in the class room tires most of them and the very intention of the teacher in making the student write in the class is lost. Interesting topics apart from the selected Texts in the class have been much more effective in making the student write well. The teacher delineates the rules of writing which includes effective use of punctuation marks and clever use of linkers etc., a potpourri of topics ranging from current affairs, music, movie reviews, fashion, science, popular games etc have always rendered the desired results. The students are asked to write a small paragraph as an initial task. The importance of framing a paragraph around the topic sentence and cohesion with an appropriate closure is always stressed upon in these sessions. These students do use cursive writing well and the importance of writing English with a right slant is reaffirmed in the class. The students thus trained now superimpose in writing the textual answers appropriately in the examinations as well.

Speaking:

The Millennial Kids do have an advantage over other counterparts due to their exposure right from their childhood to the speaking of the English language. They are ever ready to converse in English not only to their superiors but also to their peers as well. They are not reluctant to converse in the language. However pronunciation, stress and intonation are the primary factors that need to be fine tuned in this group. Every student is given a chance and encouraged to speak in the class. Public speaking skills are infused cleverly in these sessions. The students are encouraged to use their smart phones (albeit with the teacher's mindful supervision) to record the sessions. Each student is encouraged get her /his speech recorded by their classmates. They are then asked to observe their own speaking skills; to examine their body language. They are also encouraged to positively discuss their counterparts' speeches. The following questions are employed for an effective session: What did they observe? Did the speaker need improvement? How were their voices being used? How was their tone? Did they use the stress part of the language well? What are the body mannerisms that made them unique? Did they communicate effectively? The students are encouraged to keep a personal journal to note down the pertinent points. Language lab has been effectively used by the author to play famous speeches of eloquent speakers, speeches of national leaders, winning speeches from debate competitions including the Toast Masters, to improve the speaking skills of the students. However the students are warned of copying another person's style and are encouraged to have their personal signature in speaking and not to blindly follow an eloquent speaker's style. The difference between a formal usage of the language and the informal usage of the language is always stressed upon. This segment of students seems to be more comfortable with the informal usage of the language and seem to be having a lacuna in their formal usage. They are reiterated to use a formal language while addressing their superiors; not to use the popular slangs that are in practice and not to use the messaging style of informal usage in their daily conversational usage.

Listening:

This is one segment where the teacher's role becomes very important in making the students listen effectively. Tips are always given to the students in every session into becoming an Active listener. The importance of body language and gestures to convey that one is listening actively is reiterated; a student is taught to give undivided attention in the class by only interrupting a session to ask an appropriate question. The student is always encouraged to give a feedback after the session to show that he/she has listened actively. Students are discouraged to bring in their personal prejudices and to defer judgment of any speaker and to respond aptly. These exercises invariably prepare the student for a very effective professional life and in their future interviews / group discussions. Therefore the students do actively participate by demonstrating that they are effectively listening by not talking to each other. The human mind is easily distracted and thus the students, as an initial practice are made to listen – this is ensured by the teacher by relaxing the students and to put them at ease by helping them to express their concerns / doubts in a class. Every speaker including the teacher is encouraged to make an eye contact. Any unnecessary interruption is softly deferred. The student is also taught to put forth their views after the speaker has spoken and not to have any preconceived notions.

The speaker sometimes does take a long pause and therefore the students are advised not to conclude that the other person has ended their speech. The usage of pitch, tone and volume of voice is always the key to a great speech and the students are made to listen to varied speakers. They are encouraged to listen to ideas and not just words alone. The importance of non-verbal communication is included in these sessions by stressing upon the a) Gestures b) Facial expressions and c) Eye movements. Even a smile is interpreted in thousand ways. The students are encouraged to pick any additional information being spoken, via non-verbal communication because of the fact that one does not listen only with the ears but also with eyes. Verbal signs of active listening like Positive Reinforcement (without interrupting the speaker of course), Remembering a few key points, Questioning, Reflecting, Clarifying and Summarizing are reiterated by the teacher to emphasize on the importance of Listening. The Language Lab has been effectively used by the author to make the student keenly observe the afore-mentioned points. Popular English songs, popular movie dialogues, popular speeches are played and the students keenly take part in deciphering the lyrics/dialogue etc., This is a fun filled activity. The learning is enhanced here when the students actively take part in the class by playing their choice of audios. Another tried and tested technique is to first read a popular play, along with their original dialogues. The play is now streamed across in the language lab. The task given to the students is to check for any deviation from the original dialogue by keenly listening. The answers are cross checked with the original text. The deciphering of a popular English song is also another enriching activity in the class room. The playing of dumb charades where in an actor enacts the title given through sign language is another fun filled activity with the students asking appropriate questions and eliciting answers. Listening and observing are the key tools in this game along with lots of relaxation and team building skills. Another popular exercise is to listen to a News Slot, carefully screened by the teacher for the content. Students are given the task of listening at the end of which a questionnaire containing questions pertaining to the audio played is asked. Historical tourist destination documentaries can also be played and it always elicits more interest with this segment of students.

Teaching the English language to Millennial Kids with easy access to Smart Phones loaded with You Tube Videos, Audio Books, Pod cast, E-books is always a learning experience to the teacher as well. This generation of the students expect the teacher to be well versed with the use of technology and to infuse it in their teaching methodologies rather than depending upon chalk and board methods and dictating notes. They expect a holistic experience that meets their quest in terms of knowledge seeking albeit in a different hands-on, practical methodologies. The reward for any English language teacher is when she/he successfully meets their requirements and tunes their methodologies to suit the generation. The challenge is also for the teachers to upgrade and update their knowledge not just with the subject they are teaching, but also with all the current affairs and the trends. This crop of the students is aiming globally and for varied professions that includes off-beat fields which were hitherto unheard of. A successful stint in foreign and Indian Universities for a Post Graduation course begins with a proper submission of Statement of Purpose that entails them not just for admission but for fee waiver as well. A good resume goes a long way for a greater career. Writing skills play an important role here. The importance of Report Writing and presentation skills in the future is stressed upon by the teacher. A gateway to a good future includes Group Discussion wherein the

listening and speaking abilities of the individual is harnessed. Appropriate body language coupled with verbal and nonverbal skills are taught to bring about a greater participation in the class. Today's generation of the students require a good mentor in a teacher and an English Language teacher therefore becomes the one pivotal professional who can bring about a change in a students' life by encouraging active learning in a classroom.

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