ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching scholars have been trying to find an ideal way to teach English as a second language for many years. In these modern times Internet technology added another dimension to it. One really innovative strategy emerged in recent years. It is popularly called as the co-teaching model or instruction by two teachers. In this paper I focus on the effectiveness of this model in our Indian engineering colleges English language labs. After carefully considering the analyses of other scholars on this issue and the researcher’s own personal experience, it is observed that this approach is quite useful at the practical level. It is strongly recommended that adequate training be given to the teachers concerned before implementing it as this requires a lot of planning and proper coordination among all the faculty involved.

KEYWORDS: Co-teaching, student-centered learning, mixed ability classroom, teaching-learning process

INTRODUCTION:

The traditional and received notion of English Language Teaching is that ‘only one’ teacher is the authority in the classroom. But in the new millennium techniques and trends have changed. Student-centered learning, cooperative learning and a host of other such methodologies are increasingly being experimented as the traditional ones as well as Communicative Language Teaching etc., have only been partially successful.

One really innovative strategy emerged in recent years. It is popularly called as co-teaching or teaching by two instructors. In this article I focus on the effectiveness of such co-teaching at the higher education level in general and engineering students in India in particular.

What is Co-Teaching?

It is an instructional technique where two teachers use certain collaborative strategies and complement each other to the eventual benefit of students. This unique approach needs a very different style of planning, preparation and actual implementation in the classroom. There should be very good coordination between the two teachers in many aspects like, style of teaching, attitudes towards teaching and students, ego issues and a host of other such issues ranging from the sensitive aspects like psychology to the level of competency of the teacher. Ideally they should concentrate in their strong areas and if all the English language skills and different types of sub-skills are covered then the satisfaction for all the stakeholders is immense. But is it practically possible in a large Indian classroom with all its peculiar complexities. In fact this is followed in the English Language Communication Skills Labs for engineering students in India but from a totally different perspective. Here one teacher is the complete authority and the other is an associate with somewhat lesser powers despite their competency levels. Experience from surveys conducted by NASSCOM revealed that this style is again
only partially successful ranging from the extremes of excellent results to chaos and disorientation. So what is the ideal solution?

First of all there should be a clarity regarding the strong and weak points of both the teachers. This is only one dimension. The other dimensions are as follows.

1. Can this co-teaching model be applied for theory classes also? If so, then how far and to what extent?

2. Usually the teacher who teaches the theory class should also teach the lab classes also. This is normally followed in our engineering colleges. But if we follow the co-teaching model there might be several complications. The students are tuned to the teacher and his / her style of teaching, whether they absolutely like it or not. But in this model, comparisons will inevitably be made and this might lead to conflicts which will ultimately be detrimental to the teaching-learning process.

3. In order to avoid such pitfalls many specialists in this field tried to look at alternatives. Cook and Friend (1995) formulated four elementary and necessary styles for co-teaching. The first requirement is that the two co-teachers should be more or less of the same standard. In other words this kind of teaching scenario should not degenerate into a model where there is one main teacher and another is just a teaching assistant. So to maintain the necessary seriousness, two well qualified professionals should properly coordinate the workload and implement it effectively. Paraprofessionals or teaching assistants can be used for other purposes. Their second point is that this model should be implemented properly in the sense that students should not be segregated into high achieving and low achieving students. The instruction should be the same for all the students at the content level and style of teaching. The third issue that they closely analyzed is the one where diverse group of students are involved. For example some students might be very good at reading and writing skills but due to various reasons might not be that good at spoken English. So one teacher can fully concentrate on spoken English for such students and slowly they can be integrated with the other students. In fact many scholars argue that this aspect is the main advantage of the co-teaching model. Finally, it should not be misunderstood that it is a kind of remedial course. The entire process should be approached as a single unit and all the skills and sub-skills necessary should be taught in a complementary manner and the teachers should supplement and supervise the instruction of such a method in a well synchronized manner. They also emphasize on individualized instruction even in large classrooms.

Apart from the above mentioned dimensions there are other issues in this approach. This model will increase the intensity of the program, give more options to both students and teachers and will improve the overall standards of the teaching–learning process if implemented mainly to cater to the special needs of students. In this way many students also feel very satisfied as their unique requirements are given proper attention. This model is definitely useful at the higher education level and in scientific institutions where students expect something special from an English course as it is a not a core subject area for them. In fact, some of them will be so motivated and contribute a little bit more which in turn will make the other students also more interested in this different approach towards the teaching-learning process.

For institutions with limited resources where they cannot find equally qualified professionals or a situation where both the teachers are competent in the same set of skills, then the main teacher and the assistant teacher model should be followed. This style obviously has its own advantages and drawbacks. But if the main teacher takes on a quality leadership position and assigns a clear cut role to
his assistant, then this model has many benefits than even the original co-teaching model. This approach is especially useful in a mixed ability classroom. In India we often find mixed ability classrooms and so in colleges with limited resources this alternative model is also quite useful and even effective. As usual even this main teacher and teaching assistant model also requires a carefully balanced planning and if implemented in a proper coordinated manner then it provides ample opportunities for disadvantaged groups as the teachers can then use it for re-teaching, special instructions or even remedial teaching.

Within this scheme of co-teaching, there is another model called as the parallel approach where the teachers will teach the same themes in the same class but in different parts of the classroom. It has the immediate dual benefit of flexibility and also planning together. The teachers have the added advantages of implementing their own activities in an autonomous manner. If the teaching units are more specialized then it can lead to some difficult situations, but these problems are minor when compared to the huge advantages.

**How Productive is Co-Teaching?**

As usual the answer to such difficult questions lies in the actual implementation of this method. Murawski and Swanson (2001) in their research found that it is more useful in developing reading skills. But Scruggs et al. (2007) argue that it is useful depending on the quality of teaching and coordination in implementation. However, they found out that the main content and ideas remained more or less the same. Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, and Hughes (1998) discovered that with cooperative learning techniques and that extra bit of attention the teacher was able to give, it had a very good impact and constructive social relationships with other students. Overall many researchers reached a consensus that it is definitely highly productive for disadvantaged groups.

N. Eleni (2012) in her research found out that “all the teachers overwhelmingly favoured the model even with its challenges.” She also interviewed students of different proficiency levels in the same classroom and found out that they gradually adjusted and adapted themselves to this new model of teaching. Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria Dove (2008) believe that “for the sake of students, there is a place and time for creative collaboration among all teachers.” They identify five different types of co-teaching models. In most of our Indian engineering colleges only one co-teaching model is followed for the development of English and communication skills. In this model there is one principal teacher and an associate teacher. But in our engineering colleges this co-teaching is done only in labs and that too in a vastly different manner as defined by the traditional notion of the term. Most of the colleges have prescribed software installed in the 60 computer systems. The room in which they have these systems is called the multi-media lab. There is another room with around 30 chairs and some tables and this is called the Communication Skills Lab room. The main teacher conducts all the activities in this room and his associate monitors the students working on the computer systems. The software is recommended by the university and it varies from university to university. For example JNT University prescribes Globarena software. Some colleges use different softwares like K-Van solutions, Walden etc. This associate teacher has a very limited role of observing and monitoring the students and correcting their observation note books and clarify doubts, if any. The students are divided into two groups of around 30 each. One group of 30 students listens, watches, reads and writes all the communicative activities prescribed in the software. These communicative activities are basic phonetics, role play, debates etc. Real practical communicative activities are conducted by the main teacher in communication skills lab room. After one and a half hour of such activities for one group of 30 students, the teachers exchange
the roles with the other group. Marks / grades are awarded only by the main teacher and the real power and authority in terms of exams rests only with him. The associate teacher has only a nominal but important role in the sense that his physical presence as well as his academic role of clarifying doubts etc., is required. So in this sense one can call it co-teaching and the quality and success of the academic activities is mainly assigned to the principal teacher.

The present researcher recommends certain changes to this pattern so that it is in consonance with the traditional concept of the co-teaching model. The associate teacher, instead of being passive, can assume a role called ‘teacher on purpose’. He may focus on a particular language item or activity and if necessary can re-teach some skills. Of course, all this should be done in perfect coordination and understanding with the main teacher.

CONCLUSION:
The teaching-learning process is always a dynamic one and in this fast changing Internet technology dominated world teachers also have to adapt and adjust themselves accordingly. The co-teaching model is absolutely necessary to teach English and Communication Skills in labs with a large class of around 60 students. The Associate Teacher should also be given equal responsibility in terms of marks /grades apart from the obvious sharing of the language skills training programme according to their respective assets and limitations. The main aspect in this co-teaching model is proper coordination and planning among the 2 teachers involved. Apart from lessening the workload the two teachers can learn a lot from each other and share their joys, satisfaction, unique experiences, difficulties and problems. If the teachers involve in constructive observations then it should be properly acknowledged and shared. Can this be properly implemented at the practical level of everyday teaching complexities? It should again be emphasized that inexperienced teachers should be given proper training and only then should they be accommodated in this model. The experience of sharing is always better than isolated attempts at innovation. In any case the co-teaching model is quite ideal for large classrooms.

REFERENCES: