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## LANDMARK

### **Personalised Language Instruction: Trends and Innovations**

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#### **Introduction**

Language teaching has changed significantly over the years, shifting from the traditional teacher-dominated methods to more dynamic, student-focused approaches.

Structuralist linguistics and behavioural psychology influenced the traditional education model, which was led by structured grammar-translation, the audiolingual method, the direct approach, and programmed instruction. This approach treated the learner's mind as a blank slate and emphasised standardisation, uniform curricula, and teacher-led instruction as its mainstay.

In contrast, the learner-centred approach was influenced by the insights from Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence, that is, learners' abstract knowledge of language and creativity (Chomsky, 1986). Insights drawn from Chomsky's theory fuelled Communicative Language teaching (CLT), Humanistic Approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). These methods prioritised authentic communication and learner engagement. For example, in a learner-centred classroom, the teacher is likely to design tasks that allow students to use language in contexts relevant to their lives, such as writing emails or participating in presentations, rather than practising language drills of verb conjugations in isolation.

While the learner-centred approach marked a significant improvement over traditional methods, it had its limitations, paving the way for personalised instruction. The learner-centred approaches often assume homogeneity among learners. Although it gave lip-service to

differentiated instruction, it could not account for the vast diversity in learning styles, cognitive abilities, and cultural backgrounds of the learners. For instance, a learner-centred activity like group work may suit extrovert learners but could overwhelm introverts. Another common criticism of this approach was that it sacrificed formal accuracy and systematic grammar for fluency and real-life communication. A consequence of this focus leaves learners as competent communicators but linguistically imprecise (Swan, 1985a, 1985b).

The present paper explores personalised instruction in language teaching, its theoretical foundations, practical applications, benefits, challenges, and implications. It also foregrounds personalised instruction in the backdrop of multilingualism and multilingual education and the use of technology in education.

### **Beyond Methods**

A significant development of questioning Communicative-Humanistic approaches resulted in an awareness that searching for the best method is futile and a call for going beyond methods. Kumaravadivelu (2003) argued that methods are often prescriptive and fail to consider the real-life complexities of classroom situations, including learners' backgrounds, local cultures, the socio-political context of education and specific cognitive, emotional, and motivational profiles of learners. He also points out that *Beyond Methods* is searching for "alternatives to method rather than an alternative method" (pp. 32-33). It is an awareness that no one method meets all learners' needs. Teachers must adapt their teaching to meet their learners' complex and evolving needs.

Teachers who are relegated to the background in CLT have a vital role where teaching is beyond methods. They are reflective practitioners, tailoring their instruction to the unique needs of their learners and the immediate learning context instead of following a fixed set of procedures and materials of whatever method they follow. Moving beyond method allows for deeper learning, critical engagement between the learner, teacher and the learning material, and calls for teacher autonomy. *Beyond Methods* is a pedagogical stance that challenges the idea that any method can be universally effective for all teaching contexts.

Some of the key principles that define the *Beyond Methods* framework include:

- (i) *Contextual Sensitivity*: Effective language teaching must be rooted in the specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which it occurs. What works in one classroom may not work in another, even within the same school or country.
- (ii) *Teacher Agency and Reflective Practice*: Teachers are viewed not as passive implementers of pre-packaged methods and materials but as professionals capable of making complex pedagogical decisions. Their knowledge of their students, content, and environment is central to instructional design and should be allowed full autonomy.
- (iii) *Learner-Centred*: Student involvement in their own learning journey where language learners are not just recipients of knowledge but active participants in meaning-making within their locale, culture, cognition and personality
- (iv) *Critical Pedagogy*: Education should not be value-neutral. Teachers and students should be encouraged to question social norms, challenge injustices, and use language learning as a means of empowerment.

The application of this pedagogy has several challenges. The most important challenge is the limited resources. The approach relies on teachers' ability to assess and address learners' needs, and this could vary widely in accuracy and effectiveness depending on the teacher's training and experience. Added to this are institutional problems, including the standard examination system, which rests on homogeneity. However, the potential benefits of moving beyond methods are that they provide a valuable direction in language education. Teachers and learners can co-construct a learning environment that is dynamic, inclusive, and truly responsive to the realities of language use in a globalised world.

### **Post Method Pedagogy in Practice: Personalised Instruction, Treating Each Learner as Unique**

While Kumaravadivelu's theory laid the groundwork, its practical application gained momentum post-2001. Teachers and researchers began embracing a bottom-up pedagogy where teachers were viewed as theorists and reflective practitioners rather than implementers of top-down methods. There was increased involvement of both learners and teachers in curriculum design, goal setting, and assessment. Instead of classroom dynamics, individuals are given their due importance.

Greater attention is paid to cultural, institutional, and learner-specific local realities. This led to a more adaptive and inclusive approach to language teaching-learning and foregrounded multilingual, multicultural education and the use of technology, which has fundamentally changed the education scenario.

### *Theoretical Framework Underlying Personalised Teaching*

Let us first understand the theoretical framework that underlies personalised teaching. The framework draws from the following theories:

Fred S. Keller (1906–1996): In 1968, Keller introduced the Personalised System of Instruction (PSI), also known as the Keller Plan. This system allows students to learn at their own pace, emphasising mastery learning and self-assessment. It is considered one of the earliest structured approaches to personalised learning.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934): Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the gap between what learners can learn independently and what they can learn with the support of their teachers or peer group (Cole et al., 1978). So, learning tasks should challenge students but be achievable with support, a concept that aligns with personalised teaching strategies.

Howard Gardner (1983): Theory of Multiple Intelligences, challenges the traditional view of intelligence as a single, general ability. Instead, Gardner proposed eight types of intelligences, comprising linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Each person exhibits a unique combination of these intelligences, which shape how they learn and interact with the world. This theory has had significant educational implications, promoting more personalised teaching strategies catering to different learning styles.

### **Key Features of Personalised Instruction**

- **Individualised Learning Paths:** Using diagnostic assessments and ongoing data collection, personalised instruction creates unique learning trajectories. For example, a language learner struggling with correct usage of verbs might prioritise grammar exercises over vocabulary, while another excelling in vocabulary might focus on advanced reading comprehension and writing skills.
- **Holistic Consideration of Learner Profiles:** Personalised instruction

accounts for cognitive abilities and emotional, cultural, and motivational factors. For instance, a learner from a collectivist culture might enjoy collaborative tasks, while another from a more individualised culture might prefer solitary study.

- **Technology Integration:** Adaptive learning platforms, such as Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, or AI-driven tools like Grammarly, analyse learner performance in real-time and adjust content accordingly. These platforms can identify patterns in errors, suggest resources, and provide immediate feedback.
- **Flexible Pacing:** Learners progress at their own pace, allowing advanced students to move quickly through the material while others receive additional support.
- **Blended Learning:** Teachers can offer personalised assignments by combining in-person instruction with online tools. For instance, a student might complete a writing task at home using an AI tool that provides grammar suggestions, followed by a discussion in the class with the peer group.
- **Dynamic Feedback:** Continuous feedback loops, enabled by technology, help learners and teachers monitor progress and adjust strategies in real time.
- **One-on-One Coaching:** Teachers can provide personalised feedback through video calls or in-person sessions, focusing on the learners' specific challenges in resource-rich settings.

## **Major Innovations in Language Teaching After Beyond Methods with Personalisation**

### *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Evolution*

TBLT believes students learn by engaging in language tasks and not by learning about language. It makes learning immediately relevant, boosting motivation and retention. Although it predates *Beyond Methods* it has gained fresh relevance post-2001 because of its alignment with post method principles. The work of Prabhu (1987) laid the foundation and was later shaped by Long (2015) and East (2021).

Personalised tasks ensure learners acquire skills they can use in their specific contexts, enhancing confidence and fluency. For example, a student planning to study abroad might practise writing university

applications and essays, and participating in mock interviews, while a business professional might focus on drafting emails and negotiating contracts in the target language. TBLT is ideal for learners with clear, practical goals, such as professionals needing business communication skills or immigrants navigating daily interactions. Tasks can range from simple (e.g., filling out a form) to complex (e.g., delivering a speech), with support adjusted to the learners' level. Personalisation in TBLT involves selecting tasks that reflect learners' specific needs, contexts, or goals. It focuses on formative, task-based performance assessments. Feedback is individualised targeting specific errors or areas for improvement. Digital media (e.g., podcasts, blogs, VR simulations) are also included in the tasks.

### **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) with Personalisation**

CLIL a brainchild of Marsh (1994), integrated language learning with subject matter content, teaching subjects like history or science in the target language. Personalisation in CLIL involves selecting content that aligns with learners' interests or academic/professional goals and linking it with the languages that they use.

Teachers design lessons around topics relevant to learners' lives or aspirations, using the target language(s) as the medium of instruction. For example, a science enthusiast might learn biology terms in English, while a business student studies marketing concepts in Tamil. Activities are scaffolded to match language proficiency, ensuring accessibility.

CLIL is common in bilingual schools, immersion programmes, or professional training settings. It suits learners who want to combine language acquisition with academic or career development. CLIL makes language learning purposeful by embedding it in meaningful content and increasing engagement. Personalised topics ensure relevance, thus increasing motivation and student effort. It offers dual benefits by developing language skills and subject knowledge. It requires teachers with expertise in both the subject and the target language. Designing materials that balance content and language demands is complex, and learners may need significant support to handle academic content in a new language.

### **The Socially Responsible Classroom: Critical Language Pedagogies**

Following *Beyond Methods*, many scholars argued that language

teaching should not be value-neutral but should equip children to ask questions about what they are taught, and their own others' social conditions (Mangla & Agnihotri, 2012). Language teaching-learning should include social justice issues such as gender, environment, migration, marginalisation, etc. It should emphasise students' voice and empowerment, especially those from marginalised communities. It should encourage problem-posing pedagogy, where language learning is a tool for critical inquiry. According to Hooks (1994), such a pedagogy challenges the status quo and helps reimagine the world.

However, the school often disallows critical thinking to its underprivileged learners due to the language choices and the remote texts taught. According to Ilaiah (2002),

in a word, our alienation from the Telugu textbook was more or less the same as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content. It is not merely a difference of dialect; there is a difference in the very language itself. What difference did it make to us whether we have an English textbook which talked about Milton's *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*—or a Telugu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's 'Meghasandesham'? We do not share the content of either, we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives (p. 13).

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction is associated with the work of Tomlinson (2014), who popularised the concept. It tailors the content, processes, and assessments to accommodate learners' diverse needs within a single classroom or learning environment. This method ensures that instruction aligns with individual proficiency levels, interests, and learning preferences in language teaching. Teachers begin by assessing learners' current language skills, often through diagnostic tests, interviews, or self-assessments. Based on the results, they design varied activities to meet each student's skill level or learning style. For example, visual learners might engage with infographics or videos, auditory learners with podcasts or dialogues, and kinaesthetic learners with role-plays or interactive tasks. Content is also customised to learners' interests—e.g., a music enthusiast might study song lyrics, while a business professional focuses on industry-specific vocabularies, like Gardner's views on teaching. For example, in a mixed-level classroom where the

text focusses on travel, a teacher might assign tiered tasks: beginners practise basic greetings in travel situations, intermediate learners write short paragraphs/blogs, and advanced learners analyse complex texts, all centred on a common theme 'travel'. Teachers may also use flexible grouping, allowing learners to collaborate with peers at similar or complementary skill levels.

Differentiated instruction ensures inclusivity, preventing advanced learners from feeling bored or beginners from feeling overwhelmed. It fosters engagement by connecting lessons to personal interests and goals, making learning relevant and motivating. Planning differentiated lessons is demanding and requires a lot from the teacher, who has to create multiple activities and monitor individual progress. Classroom management can also be complex when juggling diverse tasks simultaneously.

### **Embracing the Languages of the Children**

India's language policy makers have articulated a multilingual framework as the foundation of the country's education policy—reflected in documents such as the National Policy of Education (Government of India, 1986), the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005), and more recently, the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020). However, in practice, India's education system remains only superficially multilingual, mostly governed by monolingual ideologies at a deeper level (Mohanty, 2009). Languages are strictly compartmentalised in schools; separate teachers are appointed for teaching each language; distinct time slots with different texts and notebooks are allocated for each language. Proficiency in a language in examinations is defined as the ability to use it well exclusively, like monolinguals do, without using any other language. It comes as no surprise that an education system that draws such strict boundaries between languages has limited scope for genuine multilingual practices (Gupta, 2024, cited in Sinha et al., 2024).

In contrast to the policies, Agnihotri's (2007, 2014) concept of multilinguality offers an inclusive alternative. He argues that multilinguality is not just a policy or a pedagogic strategy but a lived reality of all learners in India. According to Agnihotri, language classrooms should embrace the linguistic repertoires students bring, integrating these into the learning process. This pedagogy shifts the focus from teaching in

standard languages to encouraging translanguaging, code-switching, and local variations, thus empowering students rather than suppressing their identities and voices. In short, Agnihotri's (2007) vision of multilinguality offers a democratic approach to language education.

### **Technology in Language Teaching**

Technology, which is revolutionising language education, offers tools that enhance accessibility, engagement, and, above all, personalised learning experiences to those who have access to it.

With the advent of computers and the internet in the late twentieth century, language education began to transform. The introduction of multimedia resources, online dictionaries, digital flashcards, and audio-visual content helped create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. The Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the world of education, accelerating the adoption of online education, pushing schools, teachers, and students to embrace digital platforms. Many schools/colleges continue integrating online tools alongside classroom teaching, creating a blended learning environment.

Today, learners can access many tools such as language learning apps (e.g., Duolingo, Babbel, Rosetta Stone), online courses, video conferencing platforms, and collaborative tools like Google Docs and forums. These technologies have made language learning more engaging and allowed learners to study at their own pace and convenience, often from the comfort of their homes.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI): Another Game Changer in Language Education**

AI represents the latest and most transformative wave in language teaching technologies. By understanding a learner's strengths, weaknesses, pace, and preferences through learner data, AI can generate custom lesson plans, recommend content, and even predict areas where learners might struggle in the future. Unlike earlier tools that delivered content, AI-powered systems can analyse, adapt, and respond to learners in real time. These systems use natural language processing (NLP), machine learning, and speech recognition to provide personalised learning experiences. Some of the ways that are used are:

- Intelligent Tutoring Systems: AI can simulate human tutors through

intelligent tutoring. These platforms assess a student's performance and adjust the difficulty of tasks, offering hints or feedback as needed. Tools like Carnegie Learning and Duolingo's AI algorithms track users' progress and adapt content to learners, helping them overcome specific language barriers.

- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** NLP allows AI systems to understand and process human languages. Language apps now use NLP for grammar correction, vocabulary suggestions, and real-time translation. Grammarly, for instance, provides feedback on writing quality, tone, and clarity, which is particularly helpful for learners writing in a second language.
- **AI-Powered Chatbots and Conversational Agents:** Conversational AI agents can simulate real-life dialogues, allowing learners to practise speaking and listening in a low-pressure environment. Platforms like Replika and ChatGPT enable language learners to engage in open-ended conversations, ask questions, and receive contextual corrections. These tools help build fluency and confidence, especially for learners who lack access to native speakers.
- **Speech Recognition Technology:** Pronunciation is a key aspect of language learning, and AI-driven speech recognition tools help students practise and receive feedback on their spoken language skills. Apps like ELSA Speak analyse speech patterns and guide learners in improving pronunciation accuracy.
- **Immersive Technologies—VR and AR:** Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are transforming language learning by creating immersive environments. Platforms like MondlyVR and Immerse place learners in simulated real-world scenarios, such as ordering food in a virtual café or navigating through a foreign city. These tools enhance contextual learning, helping students associate vocabulary and grammar with practical situations.

As one can see, technology is an enabler of personalised instruction. It diminishes the geographical and temporal barriers enabling learners from different parts of the world to access high-quality language education. Gamified language apps, interactive quizzes, and multimedia content keep learners engaged by providing visual and auditory stimuli. These help in reinforcing memory and making the learning process enjoyable. AI tools provide instant corrections and explanations, allowing learners

to understand and correct mistakes immediately. The feedback loop accelerates learning and reduces the dependency on human teachers for every small query. With AI and digital platforms, language education can be scaled to accommodate millions of learners simultaneously without compromising quality. This is particularly beneficial for institutions aiming to provide language education on a large scale.

Despite the numerous benefits, integrating technology and AI in language education has enormous challenges, especially in the developing world. Access to technology remains uneven across different regions and socio-economic groups. Learners in underdeveloped areas may lack the necessary devices or internet connectivity, exacerbating educational inequalities. Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of technology can prevent teachers from keeping pace.

In conclusion, personalised language teaching has moved with the times, enriching the learning process. Personalised teaching coupled with the use of technology without losing sight of the multilingual nature of learners helps to meet the learners' diverse needs. As education evolves, the focus remains on creating inclusive, adaptive environments that empower learners to navigate a complex, interconnected world, ensuring language learning is not just functional but a pathway to personal and societal transformation.

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