

Use of Newspapers in Developing Language Skills

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Abstract

English has become an international commodity, like oil and the microchip! Without petrol (i.e. gas) and computers, the world will come to a halt; the English language has made the world a 'global village' by giving it a global language for communication. Salman Rushdie, the renowned novelist, says that 'the English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago' and it 'grows from many roots.' No one community can claim sole ownership over the English language, which has gone genuinely global. Its use is not restricted to one country or continent; it is used in all the five continents of the world.

Keywords: global language, Newspapers.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of new millennium, trends have been changed and consequently new challenges have to be addressed with new language teaching techniques which can conveniently be used in English language teaching with the most suitable, reliable and homely examples of real life situation. This new spirit has generated a new point of view to adopt whatever is available around us and make use of familiar materials for the English class room whereby the learners have a sigh of relief after having readily involved themselves in the subject with genuine interest and commitment.

English Language Teaching, when viewed from the global perspective, has acquired elephantine proportions. The needs of the students must be addressed in a better and easier way to make sure of themselves about their learning the language. The traditional methods which mostly concentrated on vocabulary structures undoubtedly, helped many a generation which strove to learn that way. In order to meet the demands of the learners to their fuller satisfaction and teach the language, one has to adopt the new approaches,

strategies, methodologies and techniques and adapt them to learnt to the new changed scenario of the need based soft skill. Teaching and learning may be considered as two mutually defining aspects of the same process, for the teacher is not just a giver but also a receiver and the learner is not just a passive recipient of 'made to measure' packages of knowledge but also an active participant.' Looking at from this point of view, teachers and learners are both participants in an interaction activity which has been traditionally called 'teaching learning'. Teaching and learning take place all the time, everywhere. For human beings interact with objects, animate and inanimate, around them everywhere, all the times. What we find going on in an educational set-up is an attempt to capture, formalize and recycle in capsule forms an ongoing, natural, interactional process. What we call transmitting or pumping information or knowledge from a full vessel into an empty vessel; the human vessels are never full and never empty. So every teacher in his own way must create an atmosphere which should help learners 'learn how to learn.' What is mostly need, is 'exposure' to language by many ways

and means. As S.K. Verma would rightly put it language is created a new by each learner by putting together bits and pieces of environment raw material.²

Newspapers as Materials

Newspapers are one such interesting materials which stimulate and motivates the students to learn and develop their language skills with ease and comfort. Newspapers have long provided a valuable resource for language and learners alike. Resources are important to help students learn better and how they can be used more effectively. They can motivate students. Resources can be anything from book to objects that make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting. Students need to be motivated because teaching is a long and something difficult process.

Newspapers are in a way come handy for English language learning. English language teaching can be made fresh, imaginative, inspiring and engaging if it is taught through real life situations, events and incidents that are happening around which give an opportunity for the learner to involve and participate in English language learning. As Penny Ur states "it would seem fairly obvious that in order for our students to learn something new (a text, a new word, how to perform a task) they need to be first able to perceive and understand it. One of the teacher's jobs is to mediate such material so that it appears in a form that is most accessible for initial learning."³

newspapers are a valuable but often under-used classroom resource. There is a breadth of coverage in them, which means there is something of interest to almost all readers. They provide a good source of information, popular culture as they often include articles on a variety of matters like arts, music, science, sports, as well as advertisements for products and events. One newspaper may be the source of a wide range of activities for all levels.⁴ For example, in The Hindu we have a variety of materials with information ranging from regional level to international level. It is full of events, incidents, accidents, current affairs, sports, editorials, business, commerce, industry,

agriculture information technology, features like fashion page, newscap, Sudoku, TV., Radio, young world, quest, opportunities, letters to the editor, readers mail, know your English, question corner, this day that age, religion column even the Sunday magazine of the Hindu presents a variety of topics on literature, theatre, photo essay, sightings, cartoons, short stories etc. As S. Velayudhan rightly suggests our students must need lots and lots for information, for pleasure, for right reasons⁵- the right reasons being language learning.

Students learned when they are motivated and when the topics studied are interesting and relevant to their lives, a growing number of classrooms newspapers are providing sum of the best motivational and timely resources. Using newspapers in the classroom is not a new idea. The concept dates back to June 8, 1795 when the Portland Eastern Herald published an editorial that acknowledged the role newspapers can play in delivering, extending and enriching the curriculum. With today's emphasis on resource-based teaching, teachers at all levels in classrooms around the world are using newspapers to complement textbooks and provide supplementary and relevant resources in teaching language skills. Studies have shown that students who use newspapers score higher on reading comprehension tests and develop stronger critical thinking skills.

Newspapers are the 'living text books' in the hands of the learners. Newspapers have long provided a valuable resource for language and learners alike. Resources are important to help students learn better and how they can be used more effectively. They can motivate students. Resources can be anything from books to objects that make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting. Students need to be motivated because teaching is a long and something difficult process. The regular use of newspapers in the classrooms will instill habit of intensive and extensive reading.

In large classes with few resources, newspapers, even the cutting and clippings are the most useful teaching and learning aids. They can be more used of successful learning

in many ways. It gives a visual context. It is with recorded spellings how word order and sentence patterns are already there. In the class room language teachers can use newspapers to teach a wide range of topics from the alphabet to grammar structure, vocabulary, conversation techniques and skills including skimming and scanning on one hand and listening, speaking, reading and writing on the other and thus newspapers are treated as an object for linguistic dissection and analysis.⁵ Moreover the additional advantage is that it instils a sense of confidence with a feeling of familiarity in the learner who uses it. Thus newspapers are good source for these materials as they are all contextualised, well-illustrated real news-items, containing a variety of material that conforms to the psychological needs of the pupils. Language learners find newspapers motivating because they offer interesting, relevant, topical and varied information.

Newspapers are the cheapest material in largest measure on the widest range of topics. They are the most accessible print medium. They are the authentic resource containing an immense variety of text types. It brings news about the daily incidents, accidents, science and technology, historical events, trade and commerce, entertainment features, political views and reviews, sports, classified advertisements, literary reviews etc. They provide good source of popular culture, as they often include articles on music TV and sport as well as advertisements for products and events. One newspaper may be resource of activities for all the levels. In short, they are the richest treasures and the easily available material for all. Thus the immense range of information the learner gets from newspapers is a natural source of many of the varieties of written English that become increasingly important as learners progress.

Use of Newspapers in the Classroom

Newspapers are an invaluable source of authentic materials and their use in the language classroom is very much in keeping with current thinking and practice in teaching pedagogy. Indeed, for many students, the ability to read and understand English language

newspapers for work purposes represents a very real and tangible goal to aim for. A daily reading of newspapers may be fruitful for the students. It is very vital for an English teacher to eliminate the students' fear of learning English language and instruct them to use the newspapers in an appropriate manner.

General Education Value

Newspapers help keep us informed about what is happening in the world, thereby extending our knowledge and deepening our understanding. For this reason, they are of general education value and importance to students. Language and culture area inextricably linked, and the newspapers of a given target community reflect its culture through the language they contain. At one level, culture permeates language through references to the people, places, institutions, customs and traditions of that community. However, at a much deeper level this is achieved through the cultural associations of words and the shared experiences, knowledge, values, beliefs, emotions and attitudes that a writer assumes. Newspapers are an invaluable source of such information and the more widely students read, the greater their understanding of this socio cultural meaning will be.

Linguistic Data

Newspapers are linguistically topical and up-to-date, and provide valuable linguistic data. They reflect changes in the language and help students and teachers keep abreast of such changes

For Language Study

Newspapers contain a wide variety of language styles and text types which are not generally found in the course books. They provide a natural source of many varieties of written English that become increasingly important to learners and valuable for study of language.

Human Interest

The wide variety of subjects matter in the newspapers is remarkable, interesting and motivating for learners because they report real-life events

arousing natural curiosity about the world around us and our fellow human beings.

Reading as Enjoyable Activity

Reading Newspapers is an enjoyable activity and it is a popular time pass for many in the world. Inside the classroom it can help students discover their own tastes and interests. This in turn motivates them to read on their own. even outside the classroom the activity does make them expose to English more by extending their contact with the language. The varied and stimulating newspapers materials can be made use of judiciously by the English language teacher.

Diversity of Information

Teachers of English for specific purposes can make use of the diversity of information given in newspapers to suit the needs and interests of the students. This is especially important to teachers of specialist subjects in their search for suitable materials. Even a cursory glance through a newspaper and the special interest sections and supplements will reveal a wealth of material for those involved in teaching special subjects. Students learn through reading, and reading about interesting new things in one's specialist subject undoubtedly helps motivation.⁷

Teaching Materials

The constant and on-going supply of new information on a daily basis of the newspapers provides the language teachers with a lot of teaching materials that can be used to develop the learner language skills.

Convenient Units

Newspapers items are conveniently self-contained units which range from a short paragraph to a complete page. Thus they offer a great deal of flexibility for teachers in selecting material to suit their needs and the level of the students.

Skimming and Scanning

Newspapers are the most suitable material to exercise skimming and scanning skills of a very high order. Reading can be a task-based

reading to know what we are looking for or we can continue reading a particular feature- a reading for meaning. The skills of such a high order are practised because of the nature and variety of the text in the newspapers. These materials are the most naturally suited to teaching authentic reading skills when we know that second language learners are slow learners. It is difficult to think of materials more naturally suited to teaching authentic reading skills in a second language, particularly when we know that second language learners usually read slowly and often inefficiently.⁸

"Here is no greater asset to the reader of today than highly developed skill in skimming. Skimming enables a person to select quickly the content which he wants to read and discard that in which he is not interested or which is inconsequential to his purpose. Most adults develop some skills in skimming newspapers and magazines. This skill can be further developed to a very high degree and used profitably in doing all kinds of reading. Such development, however, requires instruction and practice if it is to function in the best capacity."⁹

Topicality

Newspapers are topical and so are the freshest materials in the classrooms. Theorists and linguists like Chomsky and Krashen feel that learning should be relatively natural. Methodologically learning through newspapers is really natural. Paul Sanderson stated that a very important thing that enhances success in using newspapers in the classroom is the careful design of tasks. "Grade the task-not the material" is a well-known maxim in language teaching. Lindsay ClandField and Duncan Foord remark that for any learner of the English as second language and for any teacher teaching English as foreign language what comes to mind as an authentic reading activity for their learners is using a newspaper. The newspapers are much more current than course-books, they make an excellent springboard for lessons, and they feature different types of language (narratives, stories, letters to the editor, advertisements, weather reports, articles, sports et). Even in The Hindu, an Indian daily

newspaper, 'Newspaper in Education' has almost become a regular feature appearing every Tuesday. It is further confirmed by this feature and the actual classroom tryouts that newspapers are the most relevant and the most motivating materials in the class room.

Much study has been made on exploring different theories relating to methods, methodologies, approaches, strategies but they have not yielded any lasting solutions to the problems of English language teaching and so much has to be attempted towards exploring materials in teaching language skills in a more efficient way. Whatever may be the methods and approaches, the most pragmatic and the desirable thing, seems to this teacher to be to explore the possibility of using the under-used and valuable materials like the newspapers. So it is hoped that newspapers as materials will definitely facilitate the learning and teaching of language skills.

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