

Language Teaching: Refashioning the Role of the English Teacher

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Abstract

Language is the unique phenomenon that man uses to communicate various life experiences, information, feelings, moods or ideas. The system of morphemes and phonemes within it make an utterance meaningful. Debates over the strategies to be implemented in the acquisition of a language have reached its zenith during the modern times. Language learning should be a natural process and proficiency in the different skills of the language is significant. Language acquisition device (LAD) and the age of the learner is significant in language learning. Proficiency in a language can vary according to the need of the learner- Second language (L2) or foreign language (FL). Different genres of literature can be used as a means to imbibe language. The role of the teacher in teaching a foreign language like English at different levels is highly demanding. Progressive modern teaching is activity based, skill oriented and demonstrative giving emphasis to uniqueness and creativity of the learner. The recent developments in Stylistics and language proposes the emergence of a new discipline. In this technologically advanced world, the role of the teacher has to be refashioned to suit the scenario. Innovative strategies should be implemented to engage the learner at graduate level so as to arouse his/her creativity to emerge successful in practical life.

Keywords: language acquisition, progressive modern teaching, innovative strategies, intersemiotic translation

Introduction

Early man who lived in caves, ate raw flesh and communicated through gestures has today reached the zenith of development. In the present scenario, the whole world is a digitalised globe which is closely knitted by modern means of communication. Language is the peculiar unique phenomenon that man uses to communicate with each other. Signs and symbols are used to communicate with each other. English language which is a universally accepted link language has much to do with realizing the dreams and aspirations of progressing nations.

Competence is the native speaker's innate knowledge of the language that enables him to use it Shukman (1977). The first few years of life is very significant in language learning. A natural learning environment contributes much to language learning. A baby articulates speech like sounds by the month of seven. Language acquisition is a natural process and the child's needs motivate him to produce speech sounds. Children remain very skilled at learning the inbuilt grammatical structures of a new language. Learning a L2 is easier early in life. The LAD is a controversial claim from language acquisition research proposed by Noam Chomsky in the 1960's. LAD and the age of the learner is significant in language learning (Antony, 1993).

Natural learning environments are places where children live, learn and play. School is an extended home for a young kid who goes to a student-friendly, activity-oriented school atmosphere. Optimal learning environments begin with a positive, productive school climate or campus environment and provide intellectually and emotionally safe stimulating learning environment where he is free to express his/her creativity.

The 'gurukul' system of education with the guru (teacher) as the centre of the institution and the disciples who were trained usually resided at

the residence of the guru or in a premise next to it. The material for study and the methods to be adopted were all decided by the guru and given at a pace to suit the individual. The guru was the source of all knowledge and the disciples gained it through face to face interaction. Later through the popularisation of education schools sprang up in association with religious institutions. The universalisation of education later paved the way for new schools and universities under Government administration. Education became more organised and systematic with a graded curriculum and innovative scientific strategies.

The introduction of English language brought about a great change in the educational scenario as well as other social spheres. English language as a first language (L1) was later taught in schools and colleges and the competency and skills of some of the learners sometimes matched that of native speakers. It ranged from no competency at all to native like competency. The role of the teacher in developing this competency is commendable. Only a teacher who has native-like competency and understands the learner can teach English effectively in a natural environment. The strategies to be employed by a language teacher should suit the age and level of competency aimed at. Grading of structures and vocabulary and strategies employed are significant. The language teacher is no more a provider of knowledge introducing new grammatical structures and employing practice exercises to make pupils perfect, nor is he/ she an interpreter of poems and prose. Today, the teacher is not the primary source of knowledge and information for the students. The role of the language teacher at all levels has to be refashioned so as to cater to the needs of the present-day scenario. The new strategy implemented should be student friendly and activity oriented which sustains their interest. It should motivate the students for creative efforts to nourish their development. This

paper discusses the emerging role of the language teacher at graduate level to make language and literature study a celebration of ideas.

The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher from primary through middle school, high school, higher secondary to graduate level is significant in developing competency in the language. The teacher uses the graded text books to transact language through graded grammatical structures and vocabulary. The four skills have to be given significance at all stages of the teaching-learning process. Planning is significant part of the teaching process. Proper motivation and activity-oriented class rooms contribute much to language learning. Activity oriented student-centred strategies should be employed. E-resources should be appropriately used to enhance their knowledge. Creative thinking, as Richards and Rodgers (2014) have pointed out, of the learners should be appreciated. Suitable language pedagogy which is interesting and instil research aptitude should be implemented. Appropriate evaluation techniques to evaluate all the skills of language should be carefully selected.

Issues faced by the English language teacher

The teacher finds it difficult to train the student in speaking skills when it is often neglected in the curriculum. Mother tongue interference at lexical and phonological levels are a hindrance to language teaching. Completing a huge syllabus is often a burden for a language teacher. Lack of interest on the part of the learner is yet another difficulty faced by the teacher. Policies of the government are sometimes not in par with our teaching methods. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which introduces language teaching at a higher age is a hindrance to the language learner and teacher as language learning is at its best during early childhood. The teacher

finds difficulty in creating a natural learning environment as all the other subjects are taught in the mother tongue.

Factors to be considered in teaching English as a first, second or foreign language

The knowledge in another language as in mother tongue is like possessing another soul. It has the added advantage of being more comfortable in communication as well as more sociable and culturally enhanced. The language competency of the teacher and the awareness of the of the student needs are significant. The learning objectives and level of competency to be acquired are to be kept in mind by the teacher. Teaching techniques have to be refashioned to suit the interests of the pupil community. Audio -visual aids can effectively be used for class room transaction. Vocabulary building can be done through language games and other class room activities. Enquiry based student-centred learning should be initiated by the teacher. Kinaesthetic learning should also be included. Flipped classroom activities sometimes prove useful in language transaction. Interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage in creativity is significant. Overuse of technology should be avoided. At graduate level students should be confident in the four skills of language learning to face any interview or job oriented competitive examination. A good knowledge in English language is an added advantage for Higher studies and research in any subject.

Transacting different genres of literature at graduate level

Effective modes of transaction ought to be used for different genres, like poetry, essays, drama, fiction, short story, travelogue, biography, autobiography and letters. The innovative strategies employed for the different genres should also be based on the objectives of the curriculum and of the specific units. Essays are transacted differently at

elementary, middle school, high school, higher secondary and graduate level. Different kinds of essay writing techniques with suitable examples can be discussed in the graduate classroom. Suggestions for extra reading and links can also be provided. Discussions on the topic can later be initiated as an interesting class room activity so that all the four skills can be involved in the process. Note making can be made an essential part of such activities so that it can be documented for internal assessment with recorded data. Continuous evaluation can be done effectively by the teacher by grading the students on the basis of their performance. Narrative techniques can be used effectively with the participation of the students. The concept of modern class room as a stage and the teacher as a performer can be effectively used for transacting plays. Enacting a part of the play can be a thrilling learning activity for the students. Recitation of poems and speeches can be a graceful class activity. Discussions on cinema and other branches of culture related to literature can be conducted fruitful. Literary Theory and study of the ages of literature can be made thorough by conduction of quiz competitions to motivate the learners. Study becomes fun filled activity which boosts their confidence. Difficult as well as easy questions can be included to motivate the learners at different levels. Different art forms can be brought in to make literature study interesting by presenting intersemiotic translations of the same. Activity-oriented, student-centred programmes with the teacher as facilitator will surely enhance the quality of a language class room.

Progressive modern teaching techniques employed at graduate level

The individuality and creativity of the learner should be taken into account while assigning learning tasks. A student- centred method of learning by doing can be adopted even at graduate level, but it should suit their age group and interests. Creating a natural environment for

communication in the target language is of prime importance. Students should be encouraged to speak freely and their mistakes if any be corrected in a manner that does not dissuade them from communicating. The four language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing should be given equal importance as the proficiency in a language is measured in terms of the four criteria. The teacher should be democratic in his/her approach and ensure participation of all the students. The differently abled must be given an opportunity to perform in areas of their interest and should never feel marginalised. Gender equality should also be an area of concern when classroom activities are conducted. E-resources and E-platforms have been successfully used especially during the days of the pandemic and this is likely to affect the educational culture in post-Covid days too. Too much of Online programmes and resources are likely to create serious health hazards and makes students mechanical and dull. A multitude of resources are available for the learner. The teacher is no more the only source of knowledge as it was in ancient times and so the teacher is to refashion him/her self to suit the age and culture. We are training international citizens who ought to be skilled in an international language as well as soft skills to meet the demand of the day.

A properly designed curriculum with well-trained, skilled teachers can surely work wonders to create universal citizens. A student centred, activity- oriented learning process can reduce stress and improve the mental and physical health of students. Colleges can serve as centres of excellence and fulfil a great mission by sharing of resources. Group discussions, quiz, seminars, debates, radio and television mock programmes based on curriculum, mock interviews, hand written class room magazines, creative writing, academic writing are all part of class room activities. These activities are used to transact the curriculum in an effective and interesting manner. The application of soft skills they study as part of curriculum is brought to application level when

creating audio -visual aids and conducting mock television and radio programmes. News reading and reporting are yet other activities which contribute much to their linguistic abilities as well as building their general knowledge for competitive exams. The guidance for a strong foundation for National Eligibility Test (NET) by UGC, other competitive exams and exams conducted by the Kerala Public Service Commission is also provided based on their career aspirations. Gandhiji's words 'True education must correspond to the surrounding circumstances or is not a healthy growth' is really inspiring for any teacher to facilitate his students. Evaluation of the activities can be done effectively by the teacher and recorded as part of internal assessment.

A real experience to share

Government Arts and Science College, Trithala in a small township in Palakkad in Kerala gained the attention of the public and media by conducting a Literary Festival 'arc n ciel 2020' hosted by the Department of English, where the students came out in rainbow colours to exhibit their talents. The college campus situated on the banks of the Bharathapuzha with its limitations in infrastructure served as a centre of excellence and provided a variety of linguistic and cultural experiences to the students of the institution as well as the neighbouring higher secondary, high school students and teaching community. It was really a 'dream come true', a fascinating experience for the students. The exhibition 'Jalaka' which was a part of the Festival attracted spectators in large numbers. The exhibits related to the syllabus and curriculum of English language and literature displayed the infinite variety and creativity of the participants. It boosted their confidence and motivated them to become self- reliant. Great organizational skill of the students was also evident. The Quiz with the title 'A Look Through the Ages' was very informative was

another highlight of the festival. These were all actually extended class room activities which ensured the delightful participation of the students. Recitations, speeches, poems, songs, dance performances all added to the elegance of the event. The differently abled students were the best performers in a few events. An intersemiotic translation [translation of literature to art form, as pointed out in Patricia (2019)] of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' was presented as a dramatic performance as mime which excelled in quality and won high accolades. This was a novel attempt in Intersemiotic Translation by the second-year students of English optional. The process they underwent by re-reading the text, selecting a suitable portion to be enacted, writing the script, adding music, casting, making technical innovations and then presenting it successfully before an audience was really a fantastic learning experience. The students were so involved and excited to be a part of the literary Festival which was a grand success. The multi-talented youngsters created miracles out of nothingness to make the audience wonderstruck.

The State and Central policies of education

The NEP of India 2020 approved by the Union Cabinet on 29th July 2020 outlines the vision of India's new education system. The new policy replaces the 1986 policy and introduces a number of innovations for future India in the educational scenario. The introduction of four-year interdisciplinary courses and the aim to increase the gross enrolment ratio in higher education sector including vocational education are all welcomed and hope it would transform the lives of millions of Indians. The language policy adopted by the NEP 2020 that until grade 5 or preferably under grade 8 the mother tongue or local languages should be the medium of instruction in schools is embarrassing for an English language teacher who expects to teach the language in a natural environment and teach the student in early

childhood when language learning process is much easy. The student centred, activity-oriented strategy employed by the State Council for-Educational Research and Training has been of immense help to train students in language learning and evaluation criteria is the only hindrance to the attainment of proficiency in language in schools in Kerala.

Conclusion

English language teaching and the changing role of the language teacher is a topic to be discussed with proximal interest. The teacher is no more the prominent all-knowing source of knowledge alone. Our students are living in an era where Internet resources provide any significant information of their choice at their fingertips. The teacher should refashion himself/herself as a facilitator, guide, motivator, mentor and friend to facilitate learning. Learning should be made interesting and functional with maximum peer group interaction. The competency of the teacher as well as the updating of new strategies for teaching is consequential in this mechanised world.

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