

Newspapers as Supplementary text for Pedagogical Activity in ESL Classroom

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Abstract

Newspapers are one of the best available exhaustive source for practicing English language. English enjoys the status of ex-officio language of the country. It is taught as a third language in schools and as a second language at college level. The highest number of newspapers is published in English language throughout the country. Keeping this in mind we cannot ignore that majority of learners are exposed to English language not through television or movies but through newspapers.

Reading newspapers is seemingly an intellectual habit. Newspapers have wider reach and acceptance. In such a scenario it is but natural that newspapers sooner or later find their way into the language classrooms. Language teachers traditionally depend on the prescribed course books to teach English. These course books provide detailed explanations for every aspect of language and expect the learners to grasp everything. However research in pedagogy has proved that language learning is better facilitated in environs where language interaction is natural. Newspapers can fulfill the role of environ where language occurs naturally because the language is authentic. Young adult learners of language easily connect with newspapers than a technical English text. Newspapers are linguistically rich and varied. An ESL classroom that focuses on functional English can make effective use of newspapers. Newspapers can be used to enhance the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking and vocabulary building. The best feature about making newspapers a guide in language class is that it is relatable to slower learners as well as advanced learners.

1. Introduction

English language has stood the test of time in a multilingual country such as India and emerged successful. It is the ex-officio language of India and one of the most commonly spoken languages. Today we can find people, both, educated and uneducated speaking and understanding English with various degrees of skill. A linguistically rich country such as India shows distinct difference in register and dialect from place to place even when the mother tongue may be one. We may assume learning a foreign language must be an easy task for a country exposed to such wide variety of languages. This is sadly not the case. In spite of being exposed to English language since early childhood education we find our young learners struggling to learn English language. The flourish and finesse of a native speaker is desirable but unattainable. The young adults of today, whatever their educational background, have subconsciously come to terms that they can only try to learn English this much. In such a scenario, a teacher, how much ever good intentioned and capable, can seldom help the learners.

2. Aim

The aim of this paper is to highlight how newspapers can be made use of in pedagogical activities in an ESL classroom. To depend only on course books is to limit the challenges and scope of language learning exercise. In this age of information technology and multimedia exposure, it is the responsibility of a teacher to guide their learners in selecting a media that would facilitate flawless and easy learning. A newspaper emerges as a convenient and easy tool for second language learning. The habit of reading newspapers would keep the students abreast with latest developments, also this habit would come in handy when students enter the field of competitive examinations.

3. Statement of the Problem

With every passing year there are newer and better English language learning course books available in the market, yet they remain mostly unreachable to the learners. Bigger and better colleges may have the best available books and literature in their libraries, yet learners are unable to make use of them. There are two problems with this - firstly, students have limited number of library cards and most of them think that it is essential to borrow core subject books and thereby

neglect their need to refer a good course book for language acquisition. Secondly, if a student is able to reach the library for English language learning books they are overwhelmed and intimidated when they see such huge collection of scientific English course books. Therefore learners need something that would not frighten them. It is here that locally available English newspapers fill in the crucial gap. Newspapers bridge the gap between classroom and real world

4. Literature Review

English newspapers have always been a dear ally of an English teacher. In a country where English is a foreign language, the local newspaper in English language is one of the most efficient ways to reach out and engage an ESL class. We, as teachers of English are aware of how important the habit of reading is in relation to language learning. Newspapers can encourage the habit of reading which in turn will help students become responsible and aware learners.

Wallace, on her paper 'Reading' brings out the importance of reading activity in the following lines.

A number of scholars have wished to locate discussion of reading within the wider framework of literary practices, as specific to particular socio-cultural environments. This emphasis is of relevance to teachers whose learners come to English language literacy with diverse experience of literacy in a first or other languages. (P-21)

Elaborating further of the reading skill, Wallace writes,

A more analytical approach to word level study is suggested by Stubbs (1980) who argues that written English has a semantico-grammatical base. This means that it is possible to deduce both the semantic field of words and the grammatical class to which they belong from their systematic visual patterning rather than from symbol to sound relationships. (p-22)

Newspapers present information in a systematic manner, there are clear sections that represent editorials, entertainment, science and technology, sports and culture etc. Newspapers

also present opinions, facts, theories, comments etc with concrete supporting material. Therefore the writing style of newspapers is orderly and precise. This makes for newspapers as a great source of learning technical writing and presentation skills.

Sanderson puts forth this aspect of newspapers in the following words.

Broadsheets (or broadsheet newspapers) are large sized newspapers, and are printed on a size of paper known as broadsheet, hence this term. Broadsheets are considered to be informative and objective, keeping news and opinions or comment firmly apart. They present the reader with serious news, which is supported with detailed and informed analysis and comment on economics, political and social and world events. (p 20-21)

Emphasizing the importance of learning language through newspapers, Tafani writes, Most newspapers are linguistically up-to-date and provide valuable linguistic data. They may be used for the wide variety of text types and language styles, not often found in textbooks. At the same time, newspapers provide a natural source of many of the varieties of written English, and that becomes very important to students and valuable for language study as the students progress. (p 84)

She further states,

There are different purposes and ways for using newspapers in language classroom. They may be used for the culture they transmit. The more widely students read, the greater their understanding of this culture meaning will be. They may also be used for reflecting changes in the language as well, and in doing so helping students and teachers keep up pace with such changes. We should not avoid using newspapers in the classroom only thinking that they as *difficult* for our students. It is true that the language there is difficult, but after all it is authentic. (p 84-85)

Kortner records in the ERIC Digest the advent of using newspaper in the classroom in the following words:

The newspaper is the most widely used of the media, the direct result of a national campaign by publishers, known as ‘Newspapers in Education’ (NIE). This initiative encourages the use of newspapers as an educational tool both to complement and supplement traditional classroom texts and resources materials. (Newton 1985)

Walt Gardner, a columnist for *The Japan Times* writes

In short, students are far more sophisticated than ever. Attempting to shield them from the realities of life that newspapers cover on a daily basis is an exercise in futility. Further, restricting reading to textbooks deprives students of the opportunity to become better citizens through involvement with current issues.

Moparthi in his paper *Authentic Texts as Pedagogic Tools in English Language Classroom* makes the following observations:

Authentic materials provide exposure to real language and related more closely to students’ needs. Students are exposed to real world inter-cultural discourse (Kilickaya, 2004; Martinez, 2002; Morisson, 1989; Peacock, 1997). (p-55)

5. Benefits of Using Newspapers in ELT

1. Newspapers are one of the most common, easily accessible, cheap and best form of language learning material. Newspapers are not as intimidating as course books because you *read* newspaper whereas you *learn* from course books. There is no fear of going wrong while reading newspaper because there is no pressure to perform well.
2. Newspapers are symbolic of cultured learning, enlightenment and understanding, therefore students feel proud to be seen reading newspapers.

3. Newspapers are storehouses of linguistic data. They also act as testimonials to natural change and progression that a language undergoes.
4. Every newspaper contains something of interest for everyone. Students can choose how they prefer to practice a language activity. This in turn boosts their confidence and keeps them motivated to work towards mastering a new language.
5. Newspapers can be effectively used to enable practicing sub-skills in language such as scanning, listening for specific information, identifying names of people and places.
6. Most importantly newspapers act as carriers of culture. They facilitate transfer of language and its culture to the learners.
7. Making use of newspapers in ELT classroom also enable students to subconsciously learn the mannerism associated with unique expressions in the language. The creative energies of the students are harvested to yield deeper connection with the language.

6. Some suggestions for incorporating newspapers in regular language exercises in ESL classroom

1. Instead of the regular Just A Minute (JAM) topics such as First Day in College, My Aim etc, current events would make interesting JAM topics. These could range from politics, sports, entertainment, culture, technology, editorial etc.
2. Group discussions can be conducted on current affairs of national and international events. This would make learners feel responsible and at the same time challenge their critical thinking and analytical skills.
3. Another benefit of involving students in real issues is creating awareness in the youth about issues of national and international importance that concerns human survival.

4. Interview skills can be honed by conducting mock interviews to real advertisements. This would also give them an idea of job skills required of them after completion of their course.
5. Speaking skills can be practiced by reproducing a news report verbally, rephrasing an article, describing an advertisement, adding verbal commentaries to sporting events etc.
6. Information transfer can be attempted from weather reports, business news, advertisements and cartoons.
7. Making a mini word bank by identifying and listing new words along with their meaning and usage.
8. Rearranging jumbled up cartoon strips and headlines make for fun filled language session.
9. The core essence of learning through newspapers is to develop the habit of reading. Once a learner develops the habit of reading it stays with them throughout their lives. Newspapers can be used to practice reading aloud, skimming, scanning, reading for specific information, slow reading, quick reading, eye movement and coordination.
10. Writing skills can be practiced through report writing, creating time line of an interesting event, describing physical features of a geographic place where the event took place, making notes of its people and their background, predicting impact of a current situation or political decision on its population etc.

7. Conclusion

It is essential that a teacher guide the students in choosing a newspaper that is impartial and authentic in its presentation of facts. It would be in the interest of the class and the teacher if

a teacher makes a collage or a collection of interesting topics, headlines, new words, errors, stories or anything that is worthy of discussion as these could be used and re –used for multiple batches. The creative use of newspapers in a language classroom is only limited by the creativity of the class.

The course books for language learning are only a means of teaching prescribed syllabus. A teacher should make use of material that effectively achieves the goals of the syllabus. Usually course books rely on 'one size fits all' approach. In case of ESL learning/teaching this is not true. Each learner differs in their linguistic needs, proficiency and learning skills. A newspaper gives ample freedom and scope to the learners as well as teachers to experiment. Once a learner is confident of their language abilities, they can move to more scientific method of learning language using a course book.

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