



Department of English
PSNA College of Engineering and Technology, Dindigul-624622
Tamilnadu, India

***NEW VISTAS IN ELT:
EMPOWERING ENGINEERS FOR EMPLOYMENT***

**Selected Papers Presented in the Seminar Held on
17th And 18th April 2015**

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**Newspapers in Language Classrooms:
A Tool for Professional Success**

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Abstract

With the advent of globalisation and the changing demographics in many of the world's leading countries, business environment has expanded to various geographic locations spanning numerous kaleidoscopic cultures, demanding effective cross cultural skills and professional expertise. Cross-cultural competence and knowledge of business ethics is a

pre-requisite to build long term value in an increasingly complex and dynamic work place

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

and proficiency of English entails it. Language newspapers in English ‘being readily available and being a relatively cheap source of discourse in English’ (Rajaretnam, 2002) can support today’s global citizens to learn across curriculum, cultures and promote higher level thinking skills. Our paper proposes to use ‘newspapers in English classrooms’ as a teaching tool to meet the diverse demands of language learners. This paper suggests some innovative approaches to language learning, provide need based knowledge, knowledge to develop professional skills for employability. Ultimately, the paper focuses upon strategies to use newspapers in classrooms to promote innovation, nurture teamwork, global awareness by providing learning opportunities to update proficiency in English.

Key words: Newspapers, crosscultural competence, learning across curriculum, strategies to use newspapers in classroom.

Introduction

In a developing country like India, English newspapers being readily available to all at a relatively low price, have a major role to shape and affect the linguistic abilities of people for positive outcomes. Newspapers in India have the largest reading public and are the primary link across the regions. Being accessible to the young and old, newspapers remain a great teaching source to be used in the language classrooms. These ‘living text books’(as rightly termed by NIE) expand curriculum in language classes and are very helpful in remote areas where teachers are expected to be resourceful. In the words of Thompson, ‘every part of the newspaper furnishes some new and valuable information.’

Advantages of Using English Newspapers as Teaching Tool in Language Classrooms

- Ensures better connectivity with the world
- Enables the students to look beyond the news
- Supports learning across curriculum, cultures and promotes higher level thinking skills
- Makes learning a fun-filled and enriching experience

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- Acquaints the students with newer trends of language that comes with quick connectivity
- Provides best models of clear, concise writing
- Encourages ‘participative learning’ through ‘participative journalism’
- Accelerates reading skills
- Promotes mutual understanding and acceptance of differences in a multicultural and multilingual societies
- Meets the emotional and socio-cultural demands of language learning
- Provides need based knowledge to develop life skills
- Meets the diverse demands of learners
- Provides a cost-effective method to the process of teaching and learning

Multi-cultural and Multi-ethnic Classrooma

The growing multicultural and multiethnic nature of the present classrooms demand a revolutionary change in the entire educational scenario including re-modelling language classrooms with the inclusion of newspapers to encourage participative learning to foster cultural values.’ The basic reason of selecting English newspapers as a teaching tool is very pragmatic as English newspapers cover an array of information and knowledge and that too within the reach of our students’ wallet.’(Mehta, abstract)

‘The ability of teachers to organise classrooms and manage the behaviour of their students is critical to achieving positive educational outcomes. Although sound behaviour management does not guarantee effective instruction, it establishes the environmental context that makes good instruction possible. Reciprocally, highly effective instruction reduces, but does not eliminate, classroom behaviour problems.’ (Emmer & Stough, 2001)

Classroom Activities

Classrooms are the best preparatory grounds for learners where grooming of interpersonal skills, life skills for employability can take place through various interactive and innovative sessions with newspapers as a teaching tool. Creative application of

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newspapers in language classrooms can lead to enrichment of experiences through learning by experience projects, group discussions, role play etc.

Schwartz and Bromberg (1984) have devised a newspaper course for older students that helps prepare them for effective citizenship in an interdependent world, providing instruction in global concepts such as economic interdependence, the migrations of people, environmental independence, cultural diffusion, the communication revolution, and cultural diversity. The emphasis of the course is on reading, writing, and reasoning ability; and it requires students to classify and organize materials, to identify cause and effect, and to make judgments using sound reasoning.

Here are some activities with newspapers in classrooms which have been found fruitful in inculcating in the students intellectual curiosity and humanistic values.

Newspapers for Sale and Marketing

A variety of promotional tools like television programmes, newspapers with sales and marketing advertisements are of great help to students to plan out their own advertisements of products. The learners are acquainted with the various kinds of classified and display ads in newspapers. Newspaper cuttings dealing with varieties of display and classified ads like situation wanted, matrimonial, sale and purchase are shown to students enabling them to distinguish between ads, their language and purpose. Then the students are asked to make their own advertisements keeping in view the purpose ‘to publicize some product or service’, ‘designing the product for commercial purpose’ with colourful and lucid language. Proficiency in Business Communication entails expertise in sales and marketing. Such approaches provide the students with opportunities to practice their varied skills in the natural school environment and reinforces students positively for not only displaying their marketing abilities inside classrooms but also developing in them preparedness for professional success.

Developing Written Communication through Newspapers

Newspapers being a source of lively, contemporary English could be used to develop writing skills in students where various examples from newspapers encourage them to write with clarity, fluency and accuracy to meet the needs of everyday situations and formal

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occasions. The language used in the newspaper is functional and pragmatic. So the students get to know and use functional English from the editorial page of newspapers. The classrooms can be divided into groups, where the students are given a copy of newspapers. They are asked to prepare a report on a subject of topical reference from the given newspaper. The teacher may ask the students to write a report on the cited incident in news daily, for example 'writing on cyclone affected areas', 'road accident', 'fire in factory' etc. Students are taught the difference between reporting events as an individual and reporting for newspapers. Business writing wants precision and clarity. So various articles in newspapers can be a source to teach summarising and note making skills to learners. The present topics for example 'India's performance in World Cup', 'Femina Miss India Contest' may be interesting to teach the students skills of note-making where the students need to learn the techniques of surveying, skimming, questioning, critically reading and reviewing the texts. Students learn to write sentences logically and cohesively linked together.

Newspapers for Multi-culturalism

Byram, Gribkova & Starkey feel that 'language teaching with an intercultural dimension continues to help learners to acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways. But it also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.'(9)

Howard M. Miller suggests that one very simple way for all teachers to add multicultural ideas and content to his or her curriculum is to build a classroom library of multicultural literature. (88) Newspapers can be an important part of multicultural library because they present different political and cultural perspectives which could be used as a tool to enable students to have an insight into others' cultures and customs.

Rhoades and Rhoades (1985) provide ways teachers can use newspapers to teach comprehension and critical thinking and to help students develop sensitivity and awareness of the self, the community, the nation and the world.

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Various photos from the newspapers depicting different international figures, cultures, customs, dresses, cuisine, flags of varied geographic locations can be collected to cultivate in the students cross-cultural awareness.

Very often we find the language used in the newspaper pays a price for linguistic acculturation: for not remaining a ' guest or friend', but, to use Raja Rao's words(1978:421), for becoming ' one of our own, of our own caste, our creed, our sect and of our tradition.' (Kachru 1984:309)

So, students need to be acquainted with various vocabulary items in newspapers so that they develop insight into various cultures and write English which is intelligible in a multicultural context. Lexical items on cooking, sports, films, regions can broaden their vocabulary pertaining to various cultural connotations.

Newspapers, no doubt, broaden horizon, expand vision, enrich mind and provide learning experiences for application in real life situations.

Conclusion

In the words of U.S. President, Barack Obama

'Our very survival has never required greater co-operation and understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history when we open our hearts and our minds to those who may not think like we do or believe what we do- that's when we discover at least the possibility of common ground.'

The above lines of the U.S. President seem to be reflecting upon the importance of English newspapers as the common link between masses to foster multiculturalism striving for global peace. Thus newspapers in language classrooms have a significant role to promote mutual understanding and acceptance of differences in a multicultural and multilingual society meeting the emotional and socio-cultural demands of language learners.

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