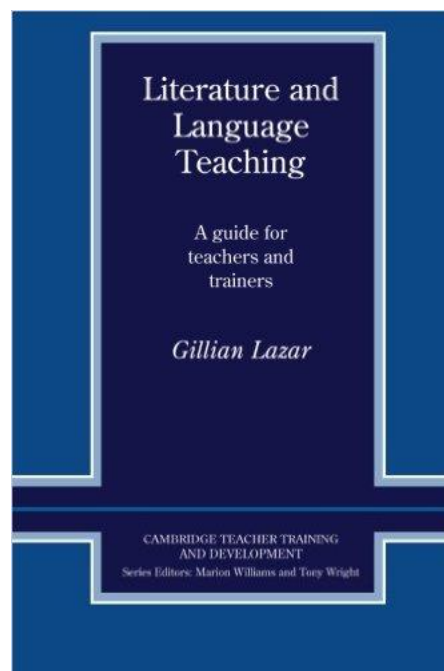


**Development of Thinking Skills During Language Teaching Using Literature: An evaluation of Gillian Lazar's
*Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers (1993)***

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Background

Nowadays, English is a commonly used medium of communication in India. The language is considered a convenient means to deal with the linguistic diversity of our nation and the cultural diversity of our world. According to Vijayalakshmi and Babu (2014), English language teaching in India is no more a colonial legacy. The authors illustrate how globalization has ensured that the acquisition of English language is more a matter of convenience rather than imperialism. Gone are the days when English language was perceived as situated in the British cultural context. Today, English is accepted as a global language with various usages pertaining to different cultures. Besides, the framework of English language teaching in India has shifted

from being literature based to skill-based (Majumdar, 2010; Vijayalakshmi & Babu,2014). That is, the focus of teaching English is not to familiarize the students with only the British culture or the ability to appreciate literary texts. English literature is taught with a view to developing language and thinking skills (Majumdar, 2010).

Problem Statement

Since the focus of pedagogy has shifted in theory, teaching practice should also keep pace with it. While innovative teaching-learning practices like the use of technology, interactive classes, and adaptation of literature are widely used, Indian students still have a long way to go in terms of acquiring language proficiency. According to a market opportunity report (n.d.) collated for the British Council, India ranks 14th out of 54 countries in English proficiency with a third category level of moderate proficiency. Moreover, according to the report, the quality of English teaching is also in question. This gap could be one of the factors that rendered Indian students unemployable. Most employers attribute unemployability among youth to inadequate thinking and language skills (Murugavel & Clement, 2014; Rajwani, 2012). Therefore, the need of the hour is an English language teaching method that could enhance Indian students' language and thinking skills.

Purpose Statement

This research evaluated the language teaching methods suggested in Gillian Lazar's *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainer* (1993) with a view to identifying how effective the methods suggested therein are in developing both language and thinking skills. The following are the research questions explored in this study.

1. What are the language teaching methods suggested by Gillian Lazar?
2. How far do Lazar's suggested methods of teaching language develop thinking as an aspect of gaining language skills?
3. What activities could bridge any gap that is identified during the evaluation of Lazar's methods?

Rationale

The rationale for the study is that the acquisition of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills without corresponding thinking skills limits the improvement of language proficiency in students. While India students score good marks in the examination, even in their English paper, several of them are unable to communicate effectively in English in real life situations. The researcher observed that the limited ability to think about the implications of the LSRW skills and about their practical use were among the reasons for most students' ineffective communication skills, which is deplored by many prospective employers. This study could identify the gap in thinking about language skills and attempt to bridge it.

Literature Review

Research shows that literature provides an effective environment to teach English language proficiency and to ensure the holistic development of a person (Ferradas, 2009; Ihejirika, 2014; Lazar, 1993). According to Ihejirika (2014), literature and language share a symbiotic relationship, which could be exploited to enhance the language competence of students. The author attributes the symbiotic relationship to the fact that any literature has language as its basis. Ihejirika (2014) states that, when we use literature to teach language, language awareness becomes essential to the development of other skills and abilities. He attributes language awareness to the learning of the “practical value both about language and in the use of language” (p.87). The author warns against teaching methods that do not focus on the language components of a text or considers teaching of literature as separate from teaching of English language.

O’Connell (2009) describes how the role of a language teacher is to transmit a combination of culture and language skills since language is deep set in the cultural context. He introduces the idea of encouraging “a more thoughtful and purposeful learning of language” (p.11). O’Connell posits that one of the aspects of thoughtful language learning is the acquisition of contemporary rather than archaic use of the language. Another practical aspect of language learning could be the presence of non-British literature in English. Studies have established the importance of using non-British literature in language classes in order to overcome the barrier of

students' limited understanding of the British context in the use of English language. For instance, Thorat (2011) establishes how Indian Writing in English appeals to the Indian sensibilities and could be used as texts to teach English effectively and interestingly in the Indian context. He also emphasizes on the need to develop thinking skills while learning English language. Similarly, Majumdar (2010) also highlights the importance of using literature to teach language skills as literature prevents language teaching from focusing only on language skills and includes training of thinking skills to ensure the holistic development of students.

It is interesting to note that when Murugavel and Clement (2014) examined English language teaching methods adopted for engineering students in Indian colleges, one of the aspects that they measured, apart from how effectively did the classes impart language skills, was whether the English professors taught students to face the challenges of the job industry. The inclusion of this aspect in their study implies the logical connection that the authors made between acquiring language skills and acquiring skills to face the challenges when using the language. Through the study, the authors noticed that the teaching of grammar concepts without stimulating student minds were rudimentary. The authors reiterated that language learning should be stimulated using different forms of literature and should also be connected to real life situations.

Ponniah (2007) calls language learning as a process of developing a person's personality. According to him, language learning develops thinking skills, which affects all forms of communications, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Ponniah (2007) thinks that rote learning of grammar rules prevents the learner from being practical or productive.

Most of the works discussed so far in this paper show that English language teaching using literature should focus not only on developing isolated language skills but also strive to develop thinking skills related to language learning. In this study, the conceptual framework for thinking skills is Robyn Collins' (2014) article on higher order thinking skills. Collins (2014) propounds the teaching of higher order thinking skills. He considers three aspects of higher order thinking, namely, transfer, critical thinking, and problem solving. Transfer refers to connecting

knowledge and skills acquired in class to real life. Critical thinking implies the ability to make decisions and act based on well-considered judgments and decisions. Collins (2014) establishes that problem solving includes both transfer and critical thinking processes to identify, analyze, and resolve a problem. The author suggested following a 5 step strategy that uses the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson et al., 2001) as a conceptual framework. The revised taxonomy refers to thinking along 6 levels namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Students could be encouraged to think along one or more of these levels of higher order thinking. While using Collins' (2014) five step strategy, the teacher first introduces the idea of higher order thinking. She then plans questioning and discussion sessions related to the topic to be covered in class. This is followed by sessions where she explicitly teaches subject concepts and provides scaffolding through use of examples, visual aids, and practice sessions. Finally, the teacher could connect the topic to real life and parallel situations and encourage students to develop metacognitive skills, that is, thinking about thinking. There are several studies related to methods of language teaching that attempt to impart thinking skills. The question is how far these methods really focus on thinking about language skills.

Methodology

This study evaluates the language teaching methods suggested in Gillian Lazar's *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainer* (1993). The evaluation identifies if Lazar's (1993) methods of language teaching confirms to Collins' (2014) suggestions on teaching higher order thinking while teaching any subject.

Preliminary Analysis

Lazar (1993) posits that literature is the best means to develop both language and thinking skills in students. She refers to three different approaches to teaching literature, that is, the language based approach, the approach that uses literature as content, and the approach where literature is taught for personal enrichment. However, an examination of all the three approaches shows that each approach contains components of English language teaching. In the language based approach she mentions three schools of thought. First, the teaching focuses on

the grammatical nuances of English. Second, it focuses on the stylistic aspects of the text that helps in the interpretation, critical analysis, and aesthetic appreciation of the literary text. Third, the teaching focuses on skills like summarizing and predicting the rest of the text. In the approach where literature is used as content, the teacher encourages students to examine and present on aspects like the historical context of the text, the biography of author, the literary movements popular during the writing of the text, the genre of text and so on. In the approach where literature is taught for personal enrichment, students are asked to discuss themes and issues in the text and connect them to parallel or real life situations. Lazar (1993) states that the research and presentation that are part of both these methods will improve the reading and speaking skills of the students.

Lazar (1993) then discusses how each of three methods could be used in the teaching of novel, short stories, poems, and plays. For convenience, the methods suggested by Lazar are categorized and summarized under a few relevant general areas of language teaching namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, vocabulary building, acquisition of grammar, and development of thinking skills. Note that some of the methods that are listed under one area might be intended to develop skills belonging to more than one area.

To Develop Listening Skills

1. The dialogues in a play are read as text.
2. Read with emotional involvement.
3. Focus on conversational language, the context, pronunciation sequencing, choice of words and grammar, role of tone, expression, and gestures.

To Develop Speaking skills

1. Student imagines herself to be a character and describes the situation
2. A situation is given and students are asked what advice they would give to the character in the situation.
3. Students are asked to give their view on themes related to the ones in the text
4. Discuss different critical points of view and symbolic meaning of lexical usages

5. Debate on themes
6. Discussion on critical writings about the text
7. Role play
8. Discussion of values depicted in the text
9. Discuss how cultural differences influence the conversation
10. Give two different sets of characters for the same situation. Ask students how the characters impact a situation.
11. Discuss costumes, see how that impacts.
12. Give background information on the text and author and discuss how it affects the text.
13. Rehearse dialogues like everyday conversation
14. Role play – let audience comment on gestures, posture, position, actions.

To Develop Reading skills

1. Read statements or comments regarding the characters, decide if the statement or comment is true or false and give reason
2. Compare and contrast between the historical and cultural backgrounds of the text and the student and make presentations in the form of play, quiz, or posters
3. Give different groups of students different lines from the text and ask them to guess the theme.
4. Read aloud focusing on speed of reading, stress, pause, and loudness. Conduct different reading sessions of the same text by varying speed, stress, pause and loudness and ask students to analyze the affect.
5. Use relevant gestures while reading a poem aloud. Vary the gestures and notice the change in impact.
6. Read a text without any background information. Then, give historical, literary, and author related information. Now, ask the students to read the text again and notice any change in perception.
7. Read critical appreciations.
8. Read dialogues from the text and guess the nature of the characters and their relation

9. Read to identify instances where the characters control or don't control the situation, or show their status and intention.
10. Read lines focusing on emotional stress. Use adjectives to describe the nature of those lines. The read aloud according to the adjective used to describe the line.
11. Introduce students to other works by the same author

To Develop Writing skills

1. Read different sentences in the story and identify which of the five W's or one H questions they answer. Find the sequence in which the text is arranged.
2. Ask students to write their own story using five W's and one H as cues.
3. Predict and write a poem from the given title; Predict the story based on pictures, cover page, title, first paragraph, or relevant phrases
4. Summarize the main point in each paragraph of the text. Give relevant titles for paragraphs
5. Write both short and long summaries. Answer questions based on the gist of the text. Attempt sentence completion based on the summary of the story
6. Read novels in sections at home. Ask students to write summaries of every section. Rearrange jumbled sentences on the plot. Give three summaries and choose the one that best corresponds to the text.
7. Use stylistic features in the story and write paragraphs
8. Write reviews on the text. Write diary entries or a letter as though the student is the character
9. From the way the text is narrated, write a description of the narrator
10. Give the title of a poem and ask students to write their own first few lines of a poem. Ask them to read the corresponding lines in the original. Ask them to write next few lines after reading the original. The exercise continues till the poem is complete.
11. Ask students to write their own critical analysis.
12. Give different translations and ask students to decide which is the most appropriate to the original.
13. Ask students to rewrite the text

14. Remove lines from a dialogue. Give a jumbled set of options. Ask students to fill the dialogue. Ask them to elaborate on what helped them complete the dialogue.
15. Complete a letter about the situation
16. Write description of characters and read it aloud. Let others guess who the character is.
17. Give dialogue writing exercise
18. One group of students are give the dialogues of only one character. Ask them to write the responses to the given dialogues as a particular character. Similarly, another group is given the responses and asked to write the other half. Compare.

To Develop Vocabulary

1. Create and give word lists with meaning. Give students vocabulary look up exercise
2. Brain storm on a lexical set important for the story. Ask them to match the word with its definition.
3. Give the text in advance to the students and ask them to prepare glossary or guess from the context and later give definition to match.
4. Give words and ask them to fill in the lines in a poem.
5. Match picture with word and then with the definition. Give definition and ask students to guess what is being spoken of.
6. Think of specific words, phrases, figures of speech, repetition and their implications.
7. Compare grammar norms to deviations in the text
8. Help understand figures of speech
9. Students decide which meaning best fits the use of the word in the poem
10. Answer comprehension about words
11. Ask students to choose from a list of words to describe their view on the themes from the text.

To Develop Grammar

1. In groups discuss grammatical elements in the story. For example, find indirect speech, use of adjectives
2. Blank out tenses of verbs from a given text and ask students to fill in with the correct tense forms

3. Choose adjectives to describe particular characters and ask students to rank them according to some trait
4. Note students' association with one particular word.
5. Ask students to reorder a jumbled sequence of sentences from a poem. Give the title also. Ask students to give reasons for their choice of order. Compare with the actual text.
6. Look at the poetic licenses and poetic devices used in the text.
7. Remove metaphors or figures of speech from the text and ask the students to fill them. List associations for some words. Read the poem and see if the associations are found in the poem.
8. Discuss the language function of each line
9. Discuss the difference in grammar and vocabulary of old and modern texts

To Develop Overall Thinking Skills

1. One set of students role play.
 2. Role play continues with different sets of students.
 3. The play is presented without the text in hand and with appropriate stage props, costumes, sound effects, and other accessories.
 4. Role play cards with variations of the same situation or part of the situation.
 5. Role play – let students guess the situation
1. Role play based on parallel real life situation
 2. Respond and interpret to relevant photos

Evaluation

An overall evaluation of the methods under areas like Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, vocabulary building, and grammar acquisition shows that Lazar (1993) has not referred to teaching any framework related to thinking, which is the first step in Collins' strategy. On the other hand, these methods do provide sufficient opportunity for the teacher to teach along the lines of the second step given by Collins. That is, Lazar (1993) encourages the teacher to prepare questions and discussions on language teaching. In Listening, questions and discussions could focus on conversational language, the context, pronunciation sequencing, choice of words and

grammar, role of tone, expression, and gestures. In Speaking, Reading, and Writing questions and discussions could focus on characters, themes, values, situations, historical and cultural context, and critical viewpoints.

Lazar's methods seem to presuppose the explicit teaching of subject concepts, which is the third step in Collins' five step strategy. In the case of language teaching, that would include concepts such as pronunciation, intonation, stress, pause, pitch, loudness, speed of delivery, grammar rules, figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, word meaning, difference between formal and informal language, and writing structure.

However, since there is no explicit mention of teaching specific language concepts in Lazar's book, most teachers might consider it unnecessary in literature classes; more so because their focus generally would be on explicitly teaching concepts related to literature rather than language. In order to develop higher order thinking related to language, the teacher ought to not only explicitly teach subject concepts but also follow the fourth step in Collins' strategy, that is, provide scaffolding through use of examples, visual aids, and practice sessions related to every concept.

Lazar (1993) does suggest the use of the text as example, the use of relevant pictures, and integrated exercises. However, Lazar's (1993) methods falter slightly when it comes to following the final step in Collins' strategy. The teacher should connect the topic to real life and parallel situations and also encourage students to develop metacognitive skills. Real life or parallel situations is touched upon during activities such as role play and while using her methods to develop thinking skills. Moreover, discussions and activities based on the impact of the context on Listening, the impact of culture on Speaking, Reading, and Writing, or the effect of specific usages on the meaning conveyed, encourage metacognitive thinking in students. However, there could be further impetus to metacognitive thinking, especially related to Reading, Writing, and vocabulary, and grammar.

For instance, what should we focus on when we are using a text to learn Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, vocabulary, and grammar? Should it be limited to the varying effects of reading the lines, between the lines, and beyond the line? Should it be on the impact of assumptions, inferences, and assertions on reading, writing, and speaking? Should it focus on how erroneous use of vocabulary and grammar could result in comic and sometimes serious miscommunication? Why should we focus on these things? How does the understanding change one's own communications skills? What are the strategies that we ourselves use to communicate effectively? How could the learning from the text be applied to our context? There are numerous such questions and discussions that the teacher could generate in order to encourage metacognitive thinking related to language using literature.

On evaluating the language teaching methods suggested by Lazar (1993) in the light of Collins' five step strategy to teach higher order thinking related to a subject, the researcher concludes that Lazar's (1993) methods certainly follow three of the steps quite effectively. However, the methods do not suggest teaching of any concepts related to thinking itself. Besides, the methods do not really exploit the full potential of encouraging metacognitive thinking related to language. With a few modifications, Lazar's (1993) could be successfully used in the Indian classrooms to build better English language proficiency among Indian students.

Suggestions

To begin with teachers could impart a basic understanding of what is higher order thinking in their language classes. They could use the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson et al., 2001) as a starting point and explain the necessity of thinking along the six levels such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. While explicitly teaching language concepts, apart from the usual LSRW concepts, the teachers could also focus on key ideas such as definitions of terms like assumption, inference, and assertion. They could also discuss various structures of writing and their impact on reading. In all cases, it would help if students are given exercises to identify examples of every concept from their own lives. Finally, the teacher could also provide an encouraging atmosphere that enables

students to rise as many questions as possible relevant to metacognitive skills, that is, thinking about thinking related to language.

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