



Second Language Transaction at the Ug Level-An Overview of Principles and Practice

KEYWORDS

Ethnocultural diversity , pedagogical practices, language competency

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ABSTRACT

The ethnoculture content of an Indian class room presents challenges in the teaching and learning of English given the wide rift between pedagogical practices which often occurs in a social vacuum. The multilingual environment of the classroom and the cultural repertoire that learners come from can often hamper the communicative deliberations of language learning since learning of a language as a linguistic system is an interpretation of its cultural aspects including personal and ethnic identity (annual review of applied linguistics 1101.30). The problem is further compounded by the presence of a rigid examination system, arid text book resources, traditional pedagogical practices and an out dated evaluative methodology. In such a context, the objectives of learning English as a second language which includes achievement of individual language competency, social adaptability and emotional well being with respect to achieving communicative proficiency gets delineated in a culturally amalgamated classroom, especially at the under graduate level where learners come from different social, cultural, economic, ethnic , linguistic backgrounds.

Introduction

The classroom as a multicultural index

Schmeders Dynamic model of post colonial English which traces the evolution of English as a world language suggests that Indian English is in the fourth phase, that is the phase of endonormative stabilisation wherein new ethnic boundaries are redefined with the existence of a new form of language that is codified and it is this codified or standard varieties that forms the medium of instruction and the language of text books at all the tertiary levels of education in India. Since learners come from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds ,the language competency that they come armed with can many a times be inadequate to deal with the complexities of higher learning especially in decoding the nuances of textbook language. This situations arises mainly due to the difference in opportunities to imbibe proficiency in English due to the educational background that they come from. Many of the economically weaker sections of the society and children of rural migrants find themselves in a disadvantageous position when compared to their peers who have an urban convent educational background .This can have adverse effects on the learning ability of the learner, since the educational structure in India is based on a rigid examination and evaluative system wherein individual competencies and nurturing of diverse forms of intelligence gets eclipsed in the quest for performance and result .The students who fail to score the requisite marks get labelled as misfits and this in turn can lead to high dropout rates.

Pragmatic challenges at the classroom level

In spite of the status of power and prestige enjoyed by English at all levels –educational competency, social adaptability or emotional self effacement, learning of the language in a multicultural context can throw up a motley of challenges both at the pedagogical level and at the curricular transaction level.

The limitations at the pedagogical level

The structure of the educational system in India leans heavily towards the Behaviorist theory of B.F.Skinner (1930) which tends to look at language learning as a mechanical process, taking focus away from the mental and cognitive

development and reducing it to mere repetition, memorization and controlled drilling reinforcement which can be either be negative or positive (Dolati Romano- overview of the three core theories of second language acquisition and criticism). This is unfortunately true in the undergraduate classrooms of many colleges and the scope for cognition or the use of language as a medium of communication is reduced to a set of exercises that juggle memory and enhance rote learning .Educators tend to define their roles in a mechanistic way as transforming a body of knowledge to students. With this role definition, classroom interactions are not based or oriented towards expression, sharing and critical examination of students experience

However the challenges faced by the teachers have also to be taken into consideration before laying the entire burden of blame on them-

- Most classrooms in colleges accommodate 70 to 80 students and the scope for group activities and individual practice exercises get eclipsed in the challenge of maintaining class discipline.
- Since most of the colleges are private unaided ones, the teachers are burdened with up to 20 hours of workload per week and many times underpaid which leaves them with little or no motivation to spruce up their teaching competencies or research explorations at the personal level.
- Each semester has less than 90 working days in practice with events, celebrations and competitions taking up many precious hours , thus putting pressure on teachers to complete of syllabus within the given time-frame.
- Students tend to focus more on subjects of specialization and the learning of English as a subject takes a backseat.
- Many of the facilitators in the higher annals of university education are not trained teachers since the qualifications entails only subject specialization in terms of an M.Phil or Ph.d degree .
- Lack of training or technical support in many colleges which reduces classrooms to mere lecture rooms.

Although some damage control methods to overcome the rather prosaic methodology has been adopted in the form of continuous evaluation in the choice based credit system which focuses on formative assignments and presentations to stoke the students communicative competency, the fact remains that due to various reasons, such systems remain effective only in principle and loses efficiency at the level of transaction.

The limitations at the level of transaction of the curriculum

Curriculum is a comprehensive plan for an educational/training programme or course to offer new and improved manpower to fulfil the rising needs of a dynamic society (Prof.Swaminathan.S.Pillai).

The end objective of any curriculum is the overall development of the learner in terms of his language competency ,his personal development and his social abilities. Given the cognitive, language and personality diversities that make up an undergraduate classroom, the curriculum must be dynamic especially at the level of transaction and if this fundamental concept is not considered the course may become unsuited to the learners for which it is designed and may become ineffective and inefficient as a means of encouraging learning in the curriculum design process, these factors are considered in three sub process- environment analysis, needs analysis and application of principles (chapter -1 .language curriculum design .ISP Nation and John Macalister)

But an analysis of the current language curriculum define a chasm between social reality and classroom learning. The scope for developing proficiency in English is grossly myopic since it leans heavily towards content learning and the grammar exercises which occur in a contextual vacuum. Besides the importance of language is grossly understated with English taught only at the foundation level, thus bringing out graduates with high performance, but low communicative index.

The matters get compounded at the level of evaluation. Although responsible curriculum design includes ongoing evaluative process (Language curriculum and Design, ISP Nation and John Macalister), the ground reality is that the evaluation is only examination based with the focus on writing and memory skills of the students. The method of evaluation is unbalanced and unsystematic without any scientific basis and with the students future at the mercy of the vagaries of the valuator.

The outright commercialisation of education stokes up the fire of rapacity with the mantra-maximum intakes for maximum profit. This not only mounts pressure on teachers but can also cause behavioural tensions in the classroom leaving little or no scope for individual attention and an outright compromise on the quality of education.

The end of any language learning curriculum is to equip the learner with a certain amount of autonomy with respect to his ability to use English at the social level. However when it comes to execution, many of these objectives remain objectives only in principle and not in practice.

Conclusion

Given the importance of English in the global context and also the pragmatic underpinnings of accessing language competency, it becomes urgently imperative to revamp the ground reality of educational system in India, especially at the undergraduate level in terms of pedagogical practices .It also becomes imperative to adopt corrective measures to help develop language competency among students. The focus should be on uplifting individual autonomy and self- esteem through adoption of functional process of learning the language rather than resting on traditional practices and churning out language deficient and socially introverted graduates..

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