

The Necessity of Acquiring Integrated Language Skills and its Possibility through Creative Ways of Teaching and Testing

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ABSTRACT--- English as a global and Multi National Companies' language has gained its tremendous importance among college students of India. Students have realized the necessity of knowing and using the language to get the job. But, how to learn it in the short period of time is the question predominantly present in these students' mind, which has to have its answer from language experts. The first and comfortable choice for teaching language at ease and quick is literature which is short and has plot and narrative. F.C. Bartlett, the psychologist, the founder of the concept of 'schema' scenario and the cognovits insist on the possibility of language learning through technical use of schemas and 'filling index' or cognitive map present in human brain. It is also a well realized fact that through concentrating on development of one skill, it is not possible to make the learners to use the language. Hence, all the four skills have to be equally given with importance to develop them in learners effectively, to enable them to use the language.

KEY WORDS: listening, speaking, reading, writing, schema, activities and literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The intention of language teaching is to initiate an interest in learners to learn and to use the language, exhibiting their proficiency in all the four study skills of the language. The aim of this research paper is to generate purposeful means to create an interesting learning experience in learners to develop skills in them and to make them use the language through the practice of creative activities and testing their proficiency in all the four skills simultaneously.

II. THE NEED OF 'PEDAGOGIC PLANNING' AND 'MODES OF ACTION' FOR INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS TEACHING/LEARNING

The need of the hour is the scheme that should provide the means for teachers to take initiative in 'pedagogic planning' with emphasis on 'effective action'. The focus areas of concern are imparting the language knowledge, training the learners in pedagogic skills and detailed preparations of 'modes of action' including content of the language course, aspects of methodology and evaluation. The benefit of this focus can be achieved only through the continuous exploration and experiments of teaching based on various methods and techniques.

So far, researches have always been concentrating on one skill or the other as the syllabus as well as existing language testing method demands the same. It is also understood that an enormous amount of researches have produced various

methodologies to develop any one particular skill or the other. But, it is a wonder that developing one particular skill can make a learner competent of using the language.

III. TEACHING IN ITS REALITY

Even in reality of teaching, either the teacher is given or taking only one or two skills like writing at the first priority and reading in the second to teach and to test the outcome. The other two listening skill and speaking skill always go untouched. The teachers alone cannot be blamed for this as most of the college teachers also shared the same above mentioned opinion while answering the questions on the skill to be improved in students. Some of the teachers also shared their common idea that this type of stereo typed language teaching is an outcome of existing syllabus as well as method of testing.

IV. THE INTER-RELATEDNESS AND INTER-DEPENDENCE OF THE FOUR SKILLS

The point that needs to be addressed here is the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill. Teaching one skill without the support of the other skill and also without concentrating on the other skill will only leave the learners crippled.

At the initial level the listening can be practiced as passive listening. But at the next level of active listening, the learner is required to respond orally as well, where speaking becomes mandatory to complete the task of listening. Likewise speaking at the first level can be rehearsed and produced. But in the next level the rehearsed production is of no use if the learner fails to listen, understand and respond to the interlocutor. So, listening skill is a compulsory one to use the speaking skill.

In reading also, the learners are trained to understand each sentence as a single unit and then each sentence's relationship with other's to understand the 'unified whole' and then finally, to summarize. Research has testified the hypothesis that 'the poor readers are less able to use summarization process effectively than good readers (Winograd. 1984)'. This summarization may mean in both written as well as spoken form with their usage of productive skills. Hence, the reading practice is fundamental for both writing and speaking skills usage.

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Each skill has its inter-relationship and also inter-dependence on each other for the comfortable learning. Along with an interesting and creative activities and formation of schema, teaching of these four skills can easily be achieved and an innovative ways of testing these acquired language skills will confirm the result of the learners using the language better than their past with the proper usage of receptive skills and productive skills.

V. ‘SCHEMA’ WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL PERCEPTION

The concept of ‘schema’ scenario was founded by a British psychologist F.C. Bartlett. ‘He said that when an individual is exposed to new information or unfamiliar information he is said to make an attempt to understand the meaning by correlating the new and unfamiliar information to the context of an existing schema’. The schema is a sort of ‘generic cognitive representation or unconscious mental structures where number of information is stored in learners’ mind, based on the familiarity of the new information to the existing information in the structures. According to him, there are many numbers of schemas which function individually as a unit and do not function as a collection of units. It is well proved that the information related to schema is well remembered.

His writing suggests that the process of memory recall is not an independent unit. It is a close association of perceiving, imaging and constructive thinking. The analysis of literature from these perceptions may very well indicate that literature will be a supportive source in perceiving, and creates a clear and vivid image through an interesting narrative technique. But, creating a constructive or creative thinking is left to the hands of teacher to make it through his/her active and creative teaching.

The cognovits insist on the availability of ‘filling index’ or cognitive map in everyone’s mind as pre-prepared source in youngsters for further literature learning experience and getting them stored. It is so possible, as every individual, would have inevitably heard lullabies or bed time stories during their pre-schooling days itself. Once these filling slots get filled in with learners’ experiences the schemas get activated.

Schemas are categorized into three. They are linguistic schema, format schema and content schema.

Linguistic schema is centered on grammar, vocabulary and syntax. Linguistic schema is a ‘prerequisite’ for using content schema. If the learner doesn’t earn enough experience for linguistic schema, it is quite difficult to use the content schema. With best manipulation of literature text, it is easy and simple for the teachers to create activities and experiences for the learners to fill in their linguistic schema.

Format schema signifies the formats or genres through which the experience is presented. The differences among the formats/ genres like myths narratives, poetry, descriptive accounts, research reports and letters give learners better understanding and possibility of deciphering meaning at ease.

Content schema indicates background knowledge developed through cultural and conceptual information gathered on reading the text on particular topic.

VI. LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH THE MODE OF INTERACTION

The missing magical aspect in our traditional language class room is the interaction. This may include interaction between the text and the learner, the learner and the peer learner, the learner and the teacher, the taught and the teacher and the learnt and the learner. This interaction changes the language teaching class room in to an active mode, where the passive monologue class room gets vanished. The interaction in connection with the literary text lays the best foundation for learning, understanding, imagining and becoming creative and so on. This interactive active learning experience through literary text fills in the schema in best way.

VII. ACTIVATING AND BUILDING SCHEMA THROUGH LITERATURE BASED ACTIVITIES

There are certain approaches with which single literary work based activities may be framed to activate and build schema concentrating on all the four skills. In a broader sense, these activities are classified as pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities.

VIII. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

There are some activities which are to be conducted before the learners get exposed to text of the chosen literature.

IX. PREDICTING AND FAMILIARIZING ACTIVITIES

The below mentioned four types of activities will set the linguistic schema prepared in learners to support the development of content schema as well as enhancement of four study skills.

a. Learners may be initiated to share their own or others experience based on the theme of the selected literature without revealing the theme to them. This activity shall help them to predict the theme of the literature.

b. Games for guessing and recollecting the meaning, predicting different forms of the word like noun, verb, adjective, adverb, affixes, and learning synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homonyms and commonly confusing words .

c. Teacher has to organize activities for familiarizing grammar rules and syntactic structures to the learners. For an example, initiating the learners to re-narrate the learnt literature through the usage of certain sentence structures may help them to get familiarized with certain sentence structures.

d. Picture prediction is a technique where the content of the text has to be presented as pictures in sequence and the learners may be asked to predict the content based on the sequential order of the pictures.



X. ON- READING ACTIVITY

Teacher has to confirm the learners' understanding of the text while reading the text itself through interaction between the teacher and the learners. This process may encourage the content schema enhancing, listening and speaking skill.

XI. POST-READING ACTIVITY & RESULTS

Once the understanding on the content is developed, the post-reading activities may be brought into the usage. These post-reading activities shall be framed for the learners to use their linguistic as well as content schemas augmenting the four study skills instantaneously.

Summing up is an activity of summarizing the learnt content in the order in a specified tense form and voice form.

Narrating is an interesting modulation that learner is expected to adapt by presenting the learnt content either in first person or second person or third person narration.

Role-play is a lively activity which makes the learner to become more expressive by playing the character that they have learnt in the text.

Creative writing is achieved through some input modification, having end of the text as beginning and pictures rearrangement in the sequence.

XII. TESTING OF ALL THE FOUR SKILLS INNOVATIVELY

The designing of the test has to be a well-balanced one between discrete (objective) and integrative testes with an objective of testing all the four skills. It has to take into account of validity, reliability practicality. Most importantly it has to have instructional value as well. As a test designer, the test is expected to show case the advantageous effect of the teaching and learning that has taken place in activity based class room. Thus, as Sarawathy quotes Hughes's remarks that 'the designer has to introduce a test with a powerful beneficial backwash effect'. With this background understanding, outcome of this experimental teaching/learning of four skills through activities shall very well be tested by applying techniques like close test, open ended questioning, bottom-up method, top-down method, role-play and creative writing .

Cloze test technique is a way of testing micro skills where a spelling or syllable in the word or a word or phrase in the sentence may be removed and the learners have to trace the answer for the missing portion based on their past experience with the text. This technique can be used to test listening, reading and writing skills.

Open ended question technique exhibits the learners' understanding of the content through their descriptive answer and their usage of linguistic as well as content schemas. This technique can be used to test listening, reading and writing skills.

Bottom-up is a method used for teaching language from the smallest unit of language to the largest to teach the whole. For instance, starting from phoneme or letter to word, then to words, then to sentence and then to message. The same technique is to be applied in testing writing as well as speaking skills.

Top-down method is a reversal of bottom-up method. Here the test has to be conducted from larger unit to the smaller unit focusing on writing and speaking skills.

Role-play is the best technique through which learners' fear of speaking in public shall be eradicated as each learner is to have a peer partner to execute the task. Here, the learners may be directed to assume each character present in the learnt literature and perform the role of it through conversation. Here specifically learners' interpersonal skill and the capacity of framing questions can be focused. Through this technique speaking skill shall be tested.

Summing-up is a yet another technique which initiates a constructive recollection of happenings presented in the learnt text. Using this technique with an insistence on the restriction of number of sentences, the teacher can make the learners to practice to use the language effectively. To allow the learners to have their comfortability to frame error free sentences, they may be asked to draft the summary at first and then to present that orally. By this way both writing as well as speaking skills can be tested.

Creative writing is an extended writing technique which can be used to test firstly the writing skill, secondly reading and speaking skills of an individual learner and thirdly, listening skill of peer learners of the class who listen to the narration of that individual learner's creative writing. And in this process a new schemata is formed in learners.

XIII. CONCLUSION

As Dr. Saraswathy pointed out that "Good materials are expected to suggest the methodology which is incorporated into materials". So, choosing the material wisely is of extreme importance. Generating creative activities can be made oceanic with the innovative mind of a teacher. Through this paper, only a few activities are presented. Since, it is a single text used for conducting activities as well as testing of four skills, the formation of linguistic schema as well as content schema is made quite strong through the process of learning by doing and answering during the tests. Likewise, the outcome shall also be made effective. The format schema is not concentrated much as single genre is followed through out. Thus, by using literature as a medium for teaching language, the four skills can be improved and the same can be tested with usage of innovative techniques.

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