

The Role of the Newspaper in the Teaching of English as a Second Language Classroom

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, major changes have taken place in the English language teaching methods, especially in second and foreign language learning scenario (Ali and Devi, 2013). The teaching of the English language has seen a shift in the use of methodologies and resources over the years (Shakibaei, Shahamat and Namaziandost, 2019). Communicative approaches to language teaching have focused on the importance of language learners acquiring skills to be able to encounter the real world, consequent on the use of authentic texts in the language being highlighted, as a result of the spread of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (Shakibaei, Shahamat and Namaziandost, 2019). The newspaper is known to be an influential tool in the sharing of information and improving the language skills of undergraduates in this vastly developing global village (Wijewardene, 2020). This paper attempts to highlight the importance of using the newspaper in the English language classroom to improve the reading writing, listening and speaking skills of students, thus transforming the classroom into a multidimensional environment.

Keywords

The English newspaper, Teaching of English as a Second Language, English language Classroom

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I. INTRODUCTION

Newspapers are considered to be a great source of learning a language (Ali and Devi, 2013). A newspaper comprises many interesting and current articles in the news, features, sports, education, business and cultural sections, which in turn, provide variety to learners. Real life events not only arouse the interest of learners but unconsciously aid in playing the role of silent language teacher. These real life events arouse students' curiosity and they not only provide knowledge, but afford a practical way of indulging students in learning language (Ali and Devi 2013).

With the help of language, people express their ideas, share information and communicate with each other (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020).

For English language learners, developing vocabulary is an imperative of the language learning process. Having a good repertoire of vocabulary knowledge is necessary to understand any form of text (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020). And the newspaper serves as an important resource in this endeavor.

In a high tech world which is largely driven by technology to improve teaching and learning, post COVID-19, newspapers offer traditional English language teaching and learning materials (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020). However, the newspaper stands tall among the plethora of motivational material to improve language skills such as reading, writing and developing vocabulary and improving spelling, as it can be easily adapted to suit the individual levels of students. Thus it could be said that newspapers can definitely supplement the traditional lectures (Ali and Devi, 2013). Most textbooks used in the English language classroom contain activities that do not conform to the true nature of communicative teaching (Nwoke, 1987) and most textbooks are unsuitable, inadequate or expensive (National Policy on Education, 1981). The reason to choose the English newspaper as an instrument in the teaching of English is two-fold: the newspaper is a cost-effective, easily accessible, friendly on the wallet textbook that provides the reader with up-to-date knowledge on a vast array of topics, whilst being a language developer which is a simple thesaurus that unconsciously improves the reader's vocabulary, in many instances (Wijewardene, 2020).

The Importance of the Newspaper in the Language Classroom

Using newspapers in the class provides real life situations of effectively acquiring and using English as a communicative tool (Education World, 2011) in addition to improving vocabulary skills, increasing knowledge and making learning more interactive and fun (Tafida and Dalhatu, 2014). The use of newspapers is encouraged as an educational tool both to complement and supplement traditional classroom texts and resource materials (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020). Modern day mass media is centered around the internet and social media, with traditional media such as print and electronic taking a backstage. There is a section of society that waits expectantly for, and deems it fit to start the day with the newspaper and its headlines (Mittal, 2014), although modern society has embraced technology where newspapers have been relegated to the back benches (Wijewardene, 2020). The world around us has seen rapid changes lately, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing the people to its feet, and there is a thirst for people to be kept informed whether by social media or through traditional media tools (Wijewardene, 2020). Yet, the newspaper remains the grand old dame of knowledge sharing (Wijewardene, 2020). The newspaper contains information on happenings both at home and around the world, which has been written in simple language, and this makes the material in the newspaper, favourable for use in the English language classroom. The importance of media in general is to inform, and, it is believed that such a role played by the English newspaper, inter-twined with education, will encourage and motivate undergraduates, whilst assisting them to sharpen their language skills (Wijewardene, 2020). Another advantage of using the newspaper in the language classroom is that it is a source of authentic language in a communicative classroom, thereby providing stimulation for learners to think, talk, and write about the things that they are familiar with and matter to them (Grundy, 1993)

Education World (2011) has enunciated ten broad reasons as to why newspapers are effective classroom teaching tools.

1. They are a medium that students of all ability levels can be read.
2. They deal with what's happening here and now, providing motivation for reading and discussion.
3. They make learning fun
4. They are extremely flexible and adaptable to all curriculum areas and grade levels.
5. They bridge the gap between the classroom and the 'real' world.
6. They build good reading habits that will last a lifetime.
7. They can be cut, marked, clipped, pasted, filed and recycled.
8. They give everyone something to read - news, sports, weather, etc.
9. They are a cost-effective way to educate.
10. They contain practical vocabulary and the best models for clear and concise writing.

In the pursuit of learning the English language, learning vocabulary takes on a pivotal role of improving language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Thiagarajah and Razali, 2020). One of the major challenges faced by language learners is increasing their vocabulary knowledge in order to improve their proficiency level (Thiagarajah and Razali, 2020). Many English language learners, whose first language is not English, face challenges in learning the English language and have preferences in choosing reading materials in English. This can lead to a fluctuating levels of vocabulary knowledge, which does not help them in learning the language and pursuing their education at a higher level especially due to the fact that English is a second or a foreign language to them (Asraf and Ahmad, 2003). Therefore, it is important to include a relevant and meaningful type of material that will attract their attention and which will enable them to practice their English language usage (Asraf and Ahmad, 2003) and newspapers seem to be an attractive teaching tool that link learners to reality (Wijewardene, 2020). Newspapers contain a rich source of information on different spheres of life, in addition to providing appropriate linguistic application, and the material therein is authentic, practical and easily accessible, providing activity-based teaching and learning situations which are learner-centred (Ajayi, 2002). Thus, the English newspaper will not only motivate the learner but also gradually eliminate the fear that the learner has for the English language (Khorshed and Rassoul, 2018).

English and the Classroom

English heads the list as the foremost world language and the medium of instruction in educational institutions, and, more importantly, is the language of science and technology (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020). There are fifteen countries such as Malaysia, Bangladesh, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and so on where English acts as the de facto official language of their countries but not as an official language (Rao, 2019).

Nations are attempting to master the English language in order to keep pace with modern trends (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020) as English has been transformed into an international language and English speaking people are found in every corner of the world (Xu, 2020). As such many approaches and methods are being introduced to ease the process of learning English so as to assist learners to acquire the knowledge of

English language (Mittal, 2014). The ability to read is one of the necessities of modern-day life (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020) and English language proficiency is vital in order to succeed in the modern global workplace.

The use of English has permeated societies and has been intrinsically interwoven into the fabric of everyday life. Rao (2019) spells out a broad-spectrum list of the important activities that come under the umbrella of the need for English: a majority of books are in English; a large number of scientific research around the world is carried out using the English language and more than 85% of the research articles are published internationally in English; 90% of the language used for internet purposes is English; it is the language used by tourists; it is the language that opens the doorway to employment opportunities; it is the language widely used for international business; it is the language used to give training to employees who work for multi-national companies such as business, pharmaceutical, software etc. It is amply evident, therefore, that there are several advantages of learning English, and a majority of people worldwide are now focusing attention on learning the English language to excel in their fields.

Graduate employability hinges around and is largely dependent on the ability to communicate in English among other factors, which is an indicator that university undergraduates are aware of the importance of English to secure employment as it is a lingua franca of international business communication (Rido, 2019). Good communication skills are imperative in increasing employability and career promotion (Abdul Kadir, Noor, and Shakizah, 2015; Al-Mutairi, Naser, and Saeid, 2014; Ranasinghe and Ranasinghe, 2012; Ting, Marzuki, Chuah, Misieng, and Jerome, 2017).

It is in this backdrop that attention must be drawn to the use of authentic material in the teaching of English, and the newspaper plays a predominant role in this regard. Teaching materials have become so important in language learning because they not only influence the procedures and content but also the effectiveness of learning (Rao, 2019). The use of authentic materials in the classroom leads students to several academic and social benefits such as increasing the learners' cultural awareness and motivation in addition to encouraging the learners to bring a sense of reality and authenticity to the English language classrooms (Rao, 2019).

As the saying goes, 'Reading maketh a man,' and much emphasis is laid upon the skill of reading as one of the necessities of modern-day life. In pursuance of this,

promoting the usage of English newspapers as an effective tool in the EFL classroom is important in the improving of the overall language skills of students (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020). In the modern world of technology, the learning of English language has become the essential need of the day as English is an international language (Akhter, Qureshi, Hassan, and Tanveer, 2019), and the usage of the newspaper is an essential and effective method of learning and teaching English (Akhter, Kausar and Faisal, 2020).

II. CONCLUSION

Newspapers expand the curriculum of English language teaching with a bottomless volume of material to practice as contextual for learning activities (Rao, 2019).

It could be said that newspapers are living textbooks, providing English teachers with authentic materials to motivate learners and boost the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and writing. Newspapers can be used as an additional English language learning material mainly because of its useful components that focuses on variety of language components (Zhu, 2017). As Brinton (1991, cited in Oura, 2001) asserts, "Authentic materials relate more closely to learners need, for they build connection between the language classroom and the outside world".

Research indicates language learners can acquire vocabulary knowledge through reading newspaper articles (Schmitt and Carter, 2000). The newspaper functions as a textbook that contains the latest information on both local and international matters (Ahmmed, 2016). Therefore, students will be able to gain general knowledge as well as improve their English language usage. The use of the newspaper is important as newspapers are easily available in both printed and electronic versions. Newspapers are available at the nearest grocery shop, and in some areas, the newspaper will be delivered to the residents' doorstep (Thiagarajah and Razali, 2020). Thus getting the material to the classroom would not be an issue for both the teacher and students. Newspapers can also be used as additional material in the classroom. The more students read, the better they understand the world around them and the culture in it, and they are able to develop their vocabulary.

Hence, encouraging students to improve and enhance their English language skills to secure their future in the ever-evolving global arena, is the responsibility of the language teacher, and in this pursuit, directing them to the easily accessible newspaper that provides abundant activities will offer immense support to students in shaping and improving their English language skills. It is very clear that it is vital to learn vocabulary in context and that is where newspapers appear particularly suitable (Shoari and Aidinlou, 2015). Reading English newspapers as a learning resource aids students to develop vocabulary and learn to read a passage in a fast manner and comprehend the key concepts that are presented in the given text (Ahmmed, 2016). The use of newspapers as an additional resource material in teaching and learning of English has increasing in recent years

(Pandey, 2019) and newspapers have the power to develop English language skills (Wolswinkel, 2008). Thus it could be said that newspapers are called the wonderful resource of understanding language (Ali and Devi, 2013). Hence, the responsibility is on the shoulders of the English language teachers to develop the language skills of the learners using the best and the most interesting material adopted from the English newspapers while teaching English to second or foreign language learners (Rao, 2019). The importance of English newspapers in the learning process of the English language takes pride of place, as reading newspapers on a daily basis can help students to improve their language skills and general knowledge (Swaminathan, 2017).

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