

Using Reciprocal Teaching Method to Enhance Language Skills of Secondary Level Learners of Telangana

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Abstract:

Reciprocal teaching is defined as a discussion between the teacher and the students (or the student leader and other group members) that teaches them how to interpret texts when they are required to read. It gives pupils access to four distinct, focused reading techniques that they can utilize to process texts actively. Clarifying, predicting, asking questions, and summarizing are some of these reading techniques. The present article focuses on how reciprocal teaching strategy can be used to enhance the language skills among secondary level English language learners.

Keywords: reciprocal teaching, English language learning, focused reading, clarifying, predicting, questioning, summarizing etc.,

In the rapidly metamorphosing world today, English has assumed a status quite beyond even its colonial significance. Today, while an upbeat India is eagerly lapping up the BPO jobs and culture, Meritrac, an Indian company that tests people's skills, has found that only 15% of people who apply for business process outsourcing (BPO) jobs here have the level of English they need. It will not be out of place or out-of-date here to recall the debate on English and the BPO requirements between Harish Trivedi (Delhi Univ), Gurucharan Das (TOI Columnist) and Kiran Karnik (Nasscom) and Several others in the Times of India, following Late Susan Sontag's Lecture 'The world as India' (Published in TLS, June 23, 2007).

Meanwhile, India's National Index of Communication Skills estimates that only 10 percent of applications are fit, language wise for BPO jobs. Given this basic information it takes no crystal gazing to appreciate the urgent need for strengthening English language teaching-learning at all levels of institutional education in India. This article, emerging from secondary level classroom work, focuses on the Teaching- Learning environment and suggests that Reciprocal methods and techniques may provide necessary tools for strengthening methods in an ELT classroom. Although

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reciprocal method is primarily helpful in developing reading skills among the learners, it is multi-strategic in nature and therefore can be very useful in strengthening all the four language skills and aid in holistic development of learners.

The paper aims to propose the standpoint that the classroom and the behavior of teachers and learners in the classroom should facilitate learning (in the technical, ELT sense) because at the end of the day what matters most is whether the learners have grasped enough language skills to communicate, not whether the linguistic behaviour accords with one or another form of current theoretical fashion. Very importantly the crux of this analysis is to explore for the best possible permutation of strategies in imparting English language skills to a plethora of participants from a wide variety of linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds whose motivation levels are at low ebb. My own experience of interaction with the learners is the basis, though limited, for this study and observation, in view of the heterogeneity of the class mandated by admission procedures. It has provided me with useful insights. The observation of classroom behaviour revealed certain glaring deficiencies.

Language Learning is taking place but not acquisition. Students are unaware of the right reading skills which is evident in their poor comprehension of the texts. Students only learn language in fragments; they learn the rules of grammar, but fail to put them into practice. We find that those students, who are sufficiently motivated, acquire the language. They also communicate in L1. A few students suffer from fear psychosis especially the disadvantaged students clubbed with the more proficient ones, find it difficult to cope, because the syllabus is oriented on a common pattern where the disadvantaged don't learn from their awareness of their own inarticulateness and suddenly face peer group ridicule. Teacher scaffolding is minimal. In spite of the paradigm shifts in teacher roles the classroom is still teacher-centered. It is evident that they need more encouragement and positive reinforcement from the teacher and also need to be motivated. There seems to be less of collaborative learning among the students Teachers seem to be unaware of particular “methods” that can be used in a classroom to enhance language learning and also the role they ought play in order to facilitate language learning. They seem to be following the only method of “one size fits all”.

Second language learning which has engendered a huge exercise of research today, refers to the process through which the participant acquires one or more second or foreign languages and it is important to note that SLA research look at acquisition where learners pick up the language

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informally through interacting in the language, but my classroom experience shows that English as a second language is more 'learnt than 'acquired' in classroom, since most of the competences of the participants 'acquisition' process are probably 'used up appreciably in L1 acquisition.

Reciprocal-Teaching Method

Reciprocal teaching is an instructional approach that includes scaffolding, direct instruction, modeling and practice. Brown & Palinscar (1983), suggest that it is an “evidence based, dialogic instructional approach that supports students within the context of collaborative community of learners”. Brown & Palinscar (1986), suggest that it incorporates “multiple strategy instruction”.

Traditional Reciprocal Teaching comprises four core understanding strategies: predict, clarify, question, and summarize.

The act of **Predicting** entails speculating on the book's overarching plot as well as the subsequent events of each chapter or section.

Questioning entails prompting pupils to stop reading a passage of a text in order to jot down any questions they might have about it.

Clarifying involves ensuring students continuously understand what they read.

Summarizing entails compressing a text to its most essential parts, both orally and in writing.

As seen above, the method primarily is suitable to improve reading skills. Palinscar and Brown (1986) observe that reciprocal teaching can be implemented in settings where there are larger and more heterogeneous groups and also in content area instruction. Another area is that of reciprocal dialogue. Brown and Palinscar (1986) observe that:

Reciprocal dialogue is also a key part of Reciprocal Teaching, which is based on the idea that group participation and dialogue help people learn and change their ideas. The way people think is also based on the fact that they interact with each other.

Freire (1997) contends that critical thinking can only be created through discourse and that meaningful education is impossible without communication. Freire says that true education is highly interactive, dialogical, and world-mediated, which is different from a "banking" view of knowledge (p. 74). In relation to pedagogical processes, Giroux and McLaren (1992) say that a critical theory of education must accept that the pedagogical process itself is a big part of how knowledge is made in

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classrooms. This is important not only to comprehend how learners actively use their own cultural resources to make sense, but also because it theoretically legitimizes the different kinds of contributions that students make to the learning method itself. (p. 23)

The Socio-Constructivist Perspective Fundamental to Vygotsky's theory is his notion that biological and cultural development occur simultaneously (Driscoll, 1994). His perspective on cognitive development differs from that of Piaget. According to Piaget, there are four major stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations (Saettler, 331). Piaget's theory suggests that progress has an endpoint or purpose. Vygotsky, on the other hand, thought that cognitive development is a lifetime process reliant on social contact. According to his theory, cognitive change occurs inside the zone of proximal development; hence, education must be designed to achieve a developmental level slightly above the student's current developmental level (Vygotsky, 1978). In order to reach the zone of proximal growth, people working together or being taught by an instructor must have the same concentration. To improve cognitive, social, and emotional communication, people need to pay attention to each other and work together to solve problems (Hausfather, 1996). Also, it's important that each partner is at a different stage of development and that the partner at a higher level knows about the partner at a lower level. If this doesn't happen, or if one person is more dominant than the other, the teamwork will be less productive. (Driscoll, 1994; Hausfather, 1996). The two most successful methods for entering the zone of proximal development are reciprocal instruction and scaffolding. The instructor can provide students with the opportunity to extend their present abilities and knowledge through the use of scaffolding. The instructor must pique the students' attention, make assignments manageable, and inspire them to accomplish the educational aim. Reciprocal instruction enables teachers and students to engage in conversation. This two-way conversation becomes an educational method by encouraging students to engage in debate beyond answering questions (Driscoll, 1994; Hausfather, 1996).

Teaching activity especially second language Teaching involves two components.

- a. How to teach- which includes the methods and techniques the teacher adopts to create an ambience for better learning.
- b. What to teach-which includes the skills and abilities indispensable for language/earning which the teacher develops in a learner.

Both a & bare interdependent and determinations are generally simultaneous with the

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assessment of the nature, composition and complexity of the classroom. The implication is that it is not always possible to administer formal diagnostic test for classroom planning. However, informal/random assessment of the range of preparedness is made enabling the teacher to determine the nature and kind of interchangeability of 'what and how. The most important reciprocal methods that can be adopted keeping in view, the constraints of syllabus and other practical limitation can be listed as.

1. Organizing the classroom, which include teacher-directed activities, independent activities, scheduling and encouraging cooperative learning.
2. Developing extensive reading through reciprocal method.
3. Promoting dialogue and discussion between a teacher and the learner
4. 4. Using think-alouds to highlight how each role is defined, how much it helps with understanding, and how it is used to make sense of what is being read.
5. Using reciprocal dialogue and providing a great deal of scaffolding.
6. Evolving effective strategies such as class wide peer tutoring.
7. Teaching social skills using taking roles, coaching and prompting.
8. Using “gradual release of responsibility” to coach, prompt and guide learners in order to make them independent learners.
9. Fostering students’ active involvement in the learning process and enhancing metacognitive skills. (Pressely,2002)

It is observed that despite adoption of already existing methods of teaching English the levels of language competence of second language is often inadequate and ineffective, with the result that there is a need to further examine how best the methods can be developed and modified in order to hone the skill of the students to the optimum level. To achieve this, it is important to aim the twin goals of remediation and modification. Second language learning rather than acquisition is the ground reality for the Indian English classroom. While larger survey is necessary for confirmation, the indication cannot be ignored. Indian reality rather than international theoretical fashion should be monitored closely for determining methods of teaching-learning English in India.

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