Simple Strategies for Effective Teaching of English at the Under-Graduate Level in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract

Learning English language is highly needed for knowledge, employment and uplift of social status. Students in rural Andhra Pradesh join the degree college without the basic proficiency in English and leave the college without acquiring the communication skills to use in day to day affairs. The current state of methodology followed in teaching English is to be blamed. To teach required skills of English by making the learning interesting, simple strategies are suggested which include motivating the students by the teachers by adopting motivational strategies. Reading programmes are to be conducted for enhancing the communication skills. Increased use of humour in English class enlivens the students and the group discussions are initiated for the over all improvement of student's English language skills.

Key words: Reading programme, Motivation, Humour, Group Discussion

Introduction

The status of English in India is high among the elite. It is mostly used in formal domains such as education, government and employment. It is used as a medium for inter-state communication, press and broadcasting. The number of newspapers, journals and magazines in English is on the rise. The spread of English throughout India is encouraged, so that it will become a genuine link language of the country, not just as it is

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at present, the link language of the elite (Tully, 1977). Therefore the underprivileged students in rural Andhra Pradesh lie on the teachers of English at the degree colleges.

The Indians who know English are viewed as providing India with a comparative advantage and a functional knowledge of English will be important for many more Indians to meet the economic challenges of the present century. The need for English to improve one's social and economic position has had an impact on undergraduate education. In Andhra Pradesh as in other states of India, English is taught as a second language at every stage of education. Though Telugu is spoken by 87% of people in A.P., more than half of personal letters are written in English and all business letters are written in English. Job interviews are carried out only in English. English has become far off from its original uses as the language of the government (Hohenthall, 2003).

In Andhra Pradesh, English is taught as a subject and not as a language. Teaching English is more examination oriented. The rural students are intelligent but they suffer from low confidence in their use of English. Presently, Andhra Pradesh state council of Higher Education changed the syllabus of English for degree students stressing the importance of speaking and listening skills. Language labs are established in most of the colleges. English paper has two parts as theory and practicals. In practicals students are tested in speaking and listening skills. In spite of these, there is deficient acquisition of English language skills among the rural students of A.P in real life situations.

The prevailing methods of teaching English are not conducive and congenial for effective learning of English. Hence, it is high time to adopt simple and will known strategies for imparting effective teaching of English. The strategies like motivating the students, conducting reading programmes, using humour in the classroom and involving students in group discussions are to be used to the optimum which result in the effective learning of English as a language and the students would obtain the basic required proficiency in English as in their mother-tongue.

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The Present Scenario of Teaching English in Rural Areas of Andhra Pradesh at the Degree Level

Students of rural Andhra Pradesh joining the degree colleges come form the poor family background. Majority of them attend the classes with single notebooks which they use for all the subjects. Most of them do not buy the prescribed English text books. On the contrary, the teachers go to the classes with textbooks and teach through translation method. The use of mother tongue is useful as for as the better understanding of the content of the text but not in acquiring the basic skills of English as the teachers are translating and explaining everything in the text in the mother-tongue. The use of two languages in the classroom can be done in such a way to provide comprehensible input in the target language (Krashen, 1985). Hence, mother tongue should not be used extensively.

Our examination pattern is also responsible for the present condition. The students focus on passing the examination rather than learning the language. The students, who do not buy the textbooks, purchase the study guides and guess papers readily available in the market before the examination period. On the other hand teachers are interested in the completion of lessons prescribed in the text. They do not go beyond explaining the lessons in the text. The students show an indifferent attitude towards English partially owing to the approach of the teachers. Students lack motivation. Only devoted teacher can motivate the students. It is the teacher's ability to turn the intelligence of rural students towards learning English. *The Hindu*, Education Plus, Sep 01, 2008 published a news item titled "Rural students more intelligent than their urban counterparts". The paper says, "The majority of students from SRR degree college, Karimnagar (A.P) opined that students from rural were poor in communication skills. They argued that rural students were far more intelligent than their urban counterparts".

Interactive sessions in English classrooms are not done often. Proper practice in using the English language is not given to students. Grammar is simply taught like

mathematical or chemical formulas. Skills can be achieved only through practice, which is something we cannot do for the pupils. They have to do it for themselves (Bright and Ms.Gregor, 1978). But teachers can provide opportunities for such practices.

Pair work and group discussions are not often followed in the English class fearing that class may become noisy. Language experts say that a noisy language class is a good and effective class. Another factor is that the students are not provided with adequate reading materials. Reading instruction in English is not followed. Most of the teachers feel shy to use humour in the class. Consequently, the English language class becomes dull, boring and uninteresting. Teachers attend the classes without much preparation of the topic to be taught thinking that teaching general English class is a child's play. They don't provide or extract the background knowledge of the topic. The students' curiosity to learn the language is missing.

Increasing the Motivation to Learn English

Teaching a second language to students in rural areas remains a great challenge because performance in exams is considered more important than for other purposes (Hussin, 2000). Motivation is a crucial factor which interacts with other factors involved in the language learning process.

Crooks and Schmidt (1991) and Gardener and Tremblay (1994) explored four motivational orientations: (a) reason for learning (b) desire to attain the learning goal, (c) positive attitude toward the learning situation and (d) effortful behavior. Hussin (2000) indentified the following factors that impart motivation in language learning:

1. Attitudes (i.e., sentiments towards the learning community and the target language)
2. Goals (perceived clarity and relevance of learning goals as reasons for learning)

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3. Involvement (i.e., extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the language learning process)

4. Environmental support (i.e., extent of teacher and peer support and the integration of cultural and outside of class support into learning experience)

5. Personal attitudes (i.e., aptitude, age, sex, and previous language learning experience)

Based on this, Hussin (2000) believes that teachers are able to drive the students to learn the language and to sustain students' interest in language learning if they provide activities that are:

- Interrelated between in – class and out of class language activities.
- Communicative (game type) integrative (short/small activities form larger activities)
- Pleasant , safe and non-threatening
- Enthusiastic
- Group – based
- Meaningful or relevant
- Challenging

These activities promote self-confidence, experience of success, learning satisfaction and good relationship among learners and between teacher and students. Teachers must get motivated themselves to motivate the students to learn English as a language. They need to ponder   over the motivational strategies and use them in every class they teach.

Conducting Reading Programmes

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Attaining sufficient proficiency in the communication skills is required in any language learnt. We learn listening, speaking, reading and writing in our mother tongue in the given order. Any language should be learned or taught in the same order. Unfortunately in Indian conditions, the same order of learning the skills in English is not possible. Possibilities of listening, speaking and writing are limited to the rural students because their mother tongue is used in their environment. Hence, opportunities for these skills are limited. But students have ample abundant materials to read. Huge number of English books is available in the library. Newspapers and magazines are available even in petty shops. So, students can develop the other skills of English through developing reading skills.

Students have poor vocabulary in English. Lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence. Vocabulary is improved only through wide reading. Many students who come to the college as poor readers remain poor readers. Hence, conducting reading programmes in English is essential at he degree level in rural Andhra Pradesh. Reading programmes help the students to develop reading strategies. Strategy means problem-solving (clay, 2001).

Strategies include:

1. monitoring awareness of one's own reading or writing
2. Searching, involving, active and flexible seeking of help from language cue systems inherent in print.
3. cross checking or using language cues form two or more sources to check one against the other (Schmidt, 2001)

The material selected for reading programmes should be interesting and alluring. The books or printed copies of stories from Folk Tales, Fairy Tales, Panchatantra can be used. Passages form daily newspapers can be selected. Some materials from the works of Indian writers in English can be used. The reading programme in English is to be conducted once in a week to students. At the end of the programme students are to be

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made to discuss in groups. The teacher should pose questions to answer. The students are also asked to write on certain item in the story. All the communication skills are practiced in the reading programme. The reading programme should provide useful, relevant and enjoyable reading experience. Students should be exposed to a variety of reading materials. The reading programme provides practice to the students in interacting with the text in active manner for comprehension.

Using Humour as a Strategy in Teaching English

The idea of using humour in teaching English is not a new concept but it is not used much in teaching. Humour makes a valuable tool in the process of teaching and learning English as a second language. Anderson (1985) says that humour can increase attention and interest and help to illustrate and reinforce what is being taught. Humour can be effectively used for increasing group dynamics, better class management, practicing grammatical structures, increasing vocabulary and learning about the culture of the English people.

Positive humour relevant to the material taught establishes a class conducive to adult- learning, defuses stress, provide an effective message delivery system and break down barriers between facilitators and learners and foster cohesiveness. (Saltman, 1995) Grammar also can be taught humorously by selecting the journal passages that focus on particular grammatical item. Teachers can use a variety of materials that are funny and entertaining. Funny cartoons are very useful. The teacher can use personal anecdotes and humorous stories. Word play is a laugh – provoking resource.

Poems can also be used for humour and effective teaching of English. Carrol (1998) asks us to consider the connotations of words in the following poem by Mary Ann Boyd Bean Arnold:

Call a woman a kitten, but never a cat:

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You can call her a mouse, cannot call her a rat:

Call a woman a chicken, but never a hen:

Or you surely will not be her caller again

You can say she's a vision, can't say she's a sight:

And no woman is skinny, she's slender and slight:

If you should burn you up, say she sets you affire:

And you'll always be welcome, you tricky old liar.

Word plays are humorous. For example, the anonymous piece "My Resume" uses word play throughout.

My first job was working in an <u>orange juice factory,</u> but I got <u>canned,</u> couldn't <u>concentrate</u>. After that I tried to be a <u>tailor</u>, but I just wasn't <u>suited</u> for it, mainly because it was a <u>so-so</u> job. Then I tried to be a <u>chef</u>, figured it would add a little <u>spice</u> to my life, but I just didn't have <u>rhyme</u>. My best job was being a <u>musician</u>, but eventually, I found I was not <u>noteworthy</u>. I studied a longtime to become a <u>doctor</u> but I didn't have any <u>patience</u>. Next was a job in a <u>shoe factory</u>, I tried but I just didn't <u>fit</u> in. After many years of training to find steady work, I finally got a job as a historian until I realized there was no <u>future</u> in it.

The best method for using this piece is to write it down on the board underlining the words used for pun and read the first section loud and the words that reflect on the speaker's occupation. Students may catch on quickly and they may be asked to explain the puns.

Teachers may download humorous practice worksheets from the internet for <u>e.g</u>. Busy teacher.org and use them in the class. These sheets give reading and speaking activity. They engage and make students think actively. The students read by themselves

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and share and discuss with their groups, after which each group thinks of answers to each question and answer as the teacher approaches each group separately.

Interactive Teaching through Group Discussions

Group discussions are excellent method of teaching and learning. Instructions should be varied from day to day to help reach the most students possible. Here the teachers are the managers and facilitators of discussions. Questioning techniques are effective in discussions, group discussion provide greater interaction between teacher and students. Teachers maintain a greater control over what is being taught because they are able to start and control the discussion. Teachers can check what students learn through the questions asked. Students will concentrate on the lesson because at the end they will be asked questions.

Group work as a form of cooperative learning means that several people work together to finish a certain task or certain learning goal (Adams and Hamm, 1990) group work rises student's learning interest, their ability and creative thinking (Johnson and Niles, 2004) and improve their team spirit and social communication skills (Fearon, Mc Laughlin and Eng, 2012) group work helps the students to improve their grammatical competence, pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence structures. In the beginning students may be reluctant to do group work and participate in group discussion. But the teacher should divide the class into small groups and motivate them to participate in discussion, Long and Porter (1985) claim that students engage in more negotiations in the small group led by teacher-centered, whole class settings.

Svincki & Mekeachie (2001) suggest a number of ways to start a discussion that will stimulate interest and build momentum for the session. Some ways, according to them to start a discussion are:

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1. **A common experience:** At the beginning of the session a shared experience is created. Examples: Reviewing a reading topic or calling attention to a recent happening in the country or state.

2. **Controversy:** Starting a discussion with disagreement.

3. **Questions:** Questions are framed to check the background knowledge

4. **A Case Study or Problem:** presenting a problem to students by asking them to consider many factors to solve the problem and keep the students focused on the same goal.

Conclusion

As the required level of learning English language is not happening at the undergraduate level in rural Andhra Pradesh owing to the present method of teaching English like any other subject, lack of proper methodology for teaching English, there is an urgent need for a change. So it is suggested to use more strategies of motivation to motivate the students to learn English and develop communication skills. The conducting of reading programmes helps the students to develop other communication skills. The use of humour in English class will arrest the attention and kindle interest in learning English. Group discussion is an important strategy which develops all the four skills of English language to the students.

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