

Action Research in ELT: The Need of the Hour

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Abstract

English is used as a first language, foreign language and second language. In India teaching English as a Second Language has always been a challenging and interesting area of research. Today, learning English as a Second Language is rather chaotic because of the disorder in the LSRW learning sequence. Listening is the primary tool in language acquisition. When listening is enhanced, all the other three skills can be acquired naturally. Also, Creativity is an important aspect in an ESL classroom. So, in connection with this, a good language teacher should also act as a researcher. Action Research is a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring one's own teaching context. The main aim of conducting action research is to identify a significant problem among the language learners. The steps involved in Action Research are - Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection. There are three categories in teacher-research orientation, and they are Descriptive, Interactive and Ideological. Action Research is used to create knowledge and implement change, which will thereby improve practice and performance. Thus, Action Research is conducted by teachers and for teachers.

Keywords: Action Research, ELT, ESL, EFL.

Introduction

English Language teaching in India has always been a challenging and interesting area of research. There are various methods and strategies adopted to make the communication of the non-native speakers effective. It is a natural tendency for all human beings to acquire their

mother tongue without external effort, whereas when it comes to learning a second language, acquisition does not happen naturally.

Many ELT practitioners all around the globe focus on enhancing the language skills of the learners. Though they share their success stories on how they improve the communication skills of the non-native speakers through their innovative methods, there has always been a trouble in implementing the same successful methods to different groups of non-native speakers. The fact hidden behind a successful method becoming a failure is that all groups do not share the same commonalities, learning difficulties, and problems. A good ELT practitioner's duty is to identify exactly the problem of the learners and design an appropriate method to solve the problem of the learners.

Why LSRW and not WRSL?

There is always an answer among the ELT practitioners to the question “Why LSRW and not WRSL?” There is a sequence for a language to be learned. When there is chaos in the sequence, disorder becomes natural. To elucidate, English practitioners strongly believe that a child easily learns his/her mother tongue because of non-digression from the laid sequence. The flow of learning the mother tongue has always been Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This is a natural process to learn a language without much effort. Moreover, the child is corrected by adults and correct language samples are provided.

Today, learning English as a second language is rather chaotic because of the rearrangement in the learning sequence provided. Widely practised order of ESL teaching in India starts with writing, reading, speaking and then listening. However, listening is the primary tool in language acquisition. When listening is enhanced, all the other three skills can be acquired more easily. LSRW is the right way of learning a language.

Creativity: An Essential Aspect

Creativity is an important aspect in an ESL classroom. The teacher should design practical activities which will nurture, develop, and motivate the students. All these activities will help the teachers to explore the role of creativity in the classroom. All learners tend to have

unique creative abilities, and the duty of the teacher is to identify them and make them use the language in a creative way. In order to learn a language effectively, creativity is necessary.

The Major Hypotheses of Second Language Acquisition

There are many theories involved in Second Language Acquisition. Here below are a few hypotheses framed by prominent theorists like Krashen, Dulay, Burt, Terrell that focus on the acquisition of a language. The major hypotheses are:

- The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis
- The Natural Order Hypothesis
- The Monitor Hypothesis
- The Input Hypothesis
- The Affective-filter Hypothesis

In **Acquisition-learning Hypothesis**, there is a meaningful interaction, the attention is on the message, and there is no error correction that paves way for explicit teaching of grammar. In **Natural Order Hypothesis**, the acquisition of grammatical structures is in natural order. This helps in learning the syllabus and textbook design. The **Monitor Hypothesis** focuses on the shift from adult monitoring to self-monitoring. The **Input Hypothesis** is comprehensible and challenging. The **Affective-filter Hypothesis** focuses on the role of a teacher and the willingness on the part of the learner to acquire the language by warding off any anxiety, stress, tension, fear of failure, etc.

Scope for Research in ELT

Research in connection with ELT can be done on:

- Use of Technology in Teaching
- Social Media and its Impact in Language Teaching
- Psychological Approaches to Language Teaching
- Sociocultural Approaches
- Cognitive Approaches to Language Teaching
- Linguistic Approaches to Language Teaching

- Role of Assessment and Evaluation in Language Teaching
- Teaching English to Differently abled Students
- Blended Learning and Learner Autonomy

A Language Teacher is also a Researcher

A good language teacher should also act as a researcher. There must always be a quest for coming to the classroom. Action research is the best way, where a teacher can act as a researcher in the classroom. Classroom Action research is a method of finding what works best in the classroom, so that a teacher can improve his/her students' learning. There are many ways and methods suggested to find the problems related to language learning. Action research is one of the best ways available to identify the problems of the learners and provide a variety of solutions.

The term “**Action Research**” was coined by Kurt Levin in his article titled, “Action Research and Minority Problems.” Teacher research involves, “rigorous examination of one’s own practice as a basis for professional development.” According to Burns, Action Research is “a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching context.” For that matter, “Research” is a systematic approach to carrying out investigations and collecting information, thereby focussing on an issue or a problem and trying to improve the classroom practice; and “Action” is all about taking practical action to resolve the classroom problems.

Action Research Classroom: A Way to Identify Problems among Students

All teachers have their own way of teaching. They all aim at improvising their knowledge about teaching. There are many teachers who practice personal reflection on teaching, whereas a few others conduct empirical studies for teaching and learning. A teacher in an Action Research Classroom is more systematic than a teacher using personal reflection, which is more personal and informal. The main aim of conducting action research is to identify a significant problem among the language learners. The steps involved in Action Research are - Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection.

Mills in his book titled, *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher* provides the following definition for Action Research:

Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes. (4)

Teacher-Research Orientation

In Action Research, there are three main reasons for doing research and for not doing research. For doing research, it is necessary to look for better instructional methods as it is necessary to solve pedagogical problems, and the teacher-researcher should have the capacity of developing them professionally. The three main reasons for not doing research are lack of time, lack of motivation, and lack of sufficient knowledge about the research methods.

There are three categories in teacher-research orientation. They are Descriptive, Interactive and Ideological. Descriptive Orientation involves scrutiny of a learner's language, examination of the verbal reports on learning strategies, and analysis of the text. Interactive Orientation involves classroom interaction analysis and ethnography. Ideological Orientation involves critical pedagogical approaches and participatory action research.

Conclusion

Understanding the learners is very much essential. Learners of the twenty-first century are digital learners. Since they are so much addictive towards technology, there is always an impatience that prevails among them. There are chances for them to be less focused. It is easy for them to easily detach themselves from a traditional classroom set-up. The positives of digital learners are that they are good multi-taskers and kinaesthetic learners, very much updated with the current trend. Before implementing any activity in the classroom, a groundwork on understanding the learners is very much necessary and important. Action Research is used in various fields like Linguistics, Psychology, Education and Sociology. In short, there are many contemporary trends related to English Language Teaching. According to Stringer (1996), Action Research is used to create knowledge and implement change, which will thereby improve practice and performance. Action Research is conducted by teachers and for teachers.

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