

Effective Erudition of English for Second Language Learner of Non-Urban Terrain

By

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Abstract

This paper visualizes the situations of a learner who is deprived of exposure denoted by the term non-urban terrain especially from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, since entire India cannot be taken due to the greater variances amongst its populace. The researcher has taken pains to pronounce to gaps in the already existing system drawing similarities and differences and suggesting workable solutions that could be easily practiced by the facilitator, making classroom experience a Student Centered Learning (SCL) experience. In addition, this paper exploits the autonomy given to the facilitator and stresses the fact that only through the autonomy given to the facilitator the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) can be successfully achieved and even suggests that the formulators of the system should give a greater time span for direct learning so as to enable the facilitator to practice innovative techniques. Therefore, the suggestions rendered in this paper do not rest upon modern complicated technological equipments but takes into consideration the mobile phone alone as a technological tool since it is an instrument available with every household even if the student is deprived of a personal one.

Key Words: *Teacher autonomy, ILOs, English as a Second Language, Teaching Poetry, Teaching Fiction, Teaching Prose, Teaching Writing Skills, Teaching Oral Skills, Student Centered Learning*

Introduction

The term second language by itself largely reminds one of English rather than any other language, since mostly English has found its way into all spheres of the lifeworld of the present society, even countries like Sri Lanka who do not use English as their only official language, tend to, at least term English into the category 'lingua franca' for academic benefits rather than its functional value. The problem at hand is that we have not placed English in its right position as a second language. Since, no language is natural or a pre-given one; a learner could acquire languages only when due place is given to the target language in their lifeworld. Many studies have come out

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projecting the importance or role of English and still many have propped the utopian methodologies to teach English effectively, yet our students are still struggling with English. Therefore, this paper is a modest attempt to elevate the already existing teaching learning process taking the underprivileged sections since when the methodologies employed use less technology and modern equipments, these methodologies become effective and functional due to their lesser dependency on external factors.

The Background

A learner who belongs to a non-urban terrain in Sri Lanka is much more underprivileged than the same learner in Tamil Nadu with regard to school education. For example, most villages do not have an English teacher in Sri Lanka and some students are not taught English until their Ordinary Level and Advanced Level. Even when the case is so, the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) can be more effective if both, the learner and the facilitator are working towards a common goal; which is absent in most of the HEIs in Sri Lanka due to the involvement of the learner into the Student's Union and the political ideologies in addition to poor standards in recruitment of having the undergraduate as the entry qualification for teaching in HEIs; and with regard to India the attraction of many towards teaching in HEIs, where most of the English lecturers do not possess a good command over language are some of the problems that can be noticed by everyone who takes a detour into the system. In addition to the above mentioned system defaults, in Sri Lanka, English is taught under various disguises such as EAP or ESP without developing the basic requirements in a learner to learn an EAP or ESP course. Moreover, English teaching is still at primary stages in the HEIs of Sri Lanka where everyone experiments at the cost of students calling it by various names ultimately culminating by calling that theirs is an eclectic one, which as we all know is the biggest cliché in the academic arena. In Sri Lanka, the teaching of English is content-free, but in India, it is content based, and both have been not yielding any major results, meaning that the pitfalls are not with the system but with the facilitators. But when comparing a content-free teaching with a content-based teaching, the content-based teaching yields more results than a content-free teaching, since content-free teaching is like playing football without any goalpost. In addition, the modern educationists feel that the drawbacks in a teacher/lecturer can be covered using technology is the biggest farce of twenty-first century with regard to language teaching. A facilitator who loves his/her job and is happy only in the well-being of their student is the primary prerequisite for the success of any erudition and in particular for learning English, since each student has to be given a

proper guidance and care which becomes a challenge in a large class. At the same time, to demand the lecturer to carry out the academic activity during their personal time outside the corridors of academic activity disturbs their personal lifeworld resulting in their poor delivery skills. Therefore, the need of the hour is to find out ways and means to develop language skills of the students within the direct teaching-learning atmosphere. It is here the situation of a learner who belongs to a non-urban terrain becomes of universal value to us, so that anything valued to such a learner can have universal application. In Tamil Nadu, an HEI has to complete 90 working days in order to declare the completion of a semester, but in Sri Lanka, no such systems are into force. In addition, the vulgar habit of handling a course for a stretch of two hours makes it more teacher centered than learner centered, since the UGC of Sri Lanka only specifies annual workload (which is a wrong practice) than a weekly workload as by the Indian UGC.

A learner who belongs to a non-urban or a semi-urban location also denotes the underprivileged in the urban limits who are not facilitated with the facilities of the elite and the affluent. Even though the learners in the villages and towns face a worse learning atmosphere when compared to the semi-urban learners in regard to their exposure, the facilitator can compensate by acting as a catalyst in creating an interest in the minds of the learners.

The Discussion

Erudition of English as a second language plays a vital role and all speakers of English are given a chance to teach either formally or informally. First of all identification of the ineffective learning patterns is vital so as to create an awareness. The ineffective patterns can be listed as: 1) Reading English Newspapers and Magazines; 2) Learning new words along with their meanings through rote learning; & 3) Learning Grammar. Learning for the purpose of clearing examinations is the only end of learning as foreseen by learners; and as a facilitator, even though this looks grim, this truth cannot be negated. Therefore, it is necessary to bring all elements into the fold of examinations so that the learner sincerely learns a skill and develops it in order to get the desired grades. In this sense, it is the testing that has to be addressed first rather than the teaching. Only when the testing is outlined with credibility, materials can be developed to provide content so as to generate a valid and meaningful teaching and learning experience. And moreover, when learners know in particular the items that will be tested, they on their own will also develop those skills. Most importantly, the failure is because we have updated teaching methodologies but still hang on to the written tests, which only test the writing skills and have thus become obsolete. The modern

move towards Cumulative Assessments/Internals is a way that has been institutionalized to revitalize and modernize the testing procedures, where the facilitator is given freedom to develop and employ their own testing tools so as to test whether the learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). And to use the traditional testing methodology of written tests, as the only testing tool in a Cumulative Assessment can be seen only as a misuse of autonomy given to the facilitator, and since the facilitator is the one who negates it, and one is forced to say that responsibility is missing on the part of the facilitator. Because, philosophically speaking autonomy and responsibility are two sides of the same coin.

Most of the course works (of learning English as a second language) have the end outcome of having a fairly good command over oral and written communication which covers the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW). Therefore, even if it is a challenge to test all these skills in the semester examinations or term-end examinations, the Cumulative Assessments / Internals gives ample room for the facilitator to use unconventional tools to test, due to the institutionalized freedom or autonomy given to the course facilitator. Therefore, the listening and speaking skills have to be tested in the Cumulative Assessments / Internals and using written examinations in these tests have to be minimized. But in reality, when students do not have written examinations in their Cumulative Assessments / Internals and only have them at the end-semester, there is little scope for the development of writing skills. Therefore, it is advisable to have as many as possible Cumulative Assessments covering oral presentations, interviews, group discussions, reading aloud and various types of written examinations. Only then, the learners will have the necessity to develop the passive skills along with the active skill.

Giving homework is not effective since very few students spend much time addressing their mistakes, and even fewer actually re-write their pieces of work and even when a teacher presents model piece of writing to the students it tends to lead to a desire to copy the linguistic features of the model rather than encouraging the students to write on their own. All of us should agree that teacher correction and the students' revision of their own work do not seem to offer enough opportunities for learning. Therefore, students have to be given trainings through activities where assignments have to be in the form of presentations, which will be documented, with the help of a video recording and best presentations could even be uploaded by the HEIs on to YouTube as a reward mechanism.

The facilitator need not provide a specific period of time for peer-learning within the direct contact hours, but needs to create a validity for peer-learning, which has to be done outside the class hours. This could be done through structuring the entire process for the learner. For example, let us take 'Poetry' where the facilitator announces that learners have to teach a particular poem of their choice from the chosen poems for that course work in the class for five to ten minutes before the facilitator deals with that particular piece of poem; and this exercise will be a part of their Cumulative Assessment. Moreover, the following preparatory advice is to be given which the learner needs to follow systematically in order to deliver an effective presentation:

Step 1: Listen to the YouTube or any online reading of the poem;

Step 2: Imitate the YouTube or online reading of the poem;

Step 3: If you have a recording mechanism (preferably a mobile) try to record your final reading that you think is on par with the reading you did listen to in the YouTube or online resource;

Step 4: Compare the recording of your reading with the YouTube or online resource;

Step 5: Try to correct your reading of the poem if there are any variances;

Step 6: If unable to correct the variances get help from your seniors or your facilitator;

Step 7: Analyze the poem, use resources that are at your disposal;

Step 8: Prepare a well-written document of your analysis of the poem, which can be submitted as a written assignment;

Step 9: In a separate piece of paper jot-down the major points or points that you would like to cover in a 5 to 10 minute presentation;

Step 10: Do a full presentation in front of a mirror or by yourself and see, whether the reading of the poem and the presentation fall within a duration of 10 minutes;

Step 11: Try to make a presentation (mock-presentation) in front of your friends and get their feedback. If suggestions are given...

Step 12: Re-do the presentation incorporating those suggestions;

Step 13: Encourage friends to ask questions after the mock-presentation and see whether you are able to answer them;

Step 14: Then present it in the class.

In this manner, each day before the facilitator begins to teach a poem, a student could do a short teaching on that particular poem in the class and also submit the written analysis of that poem and thus two assignments can be done successfully. In addition to this, the facilitator should

encourage the learners to imitate the facilitator in reading the poems, (in this sense, the facilitator should develop a very good poetry reading skill).

In addition to the above one, we should be aware that poetry is something that is intended to be read aloud and when the entire teaching is done by having the learners as passive participants the prescription of poetry to teach English is simply nullified and this is one of the main reasons for the underdevelopment of the required skills. In fact, to do an active reading in the class either the poems have to be split into vertical half so that the class is divided into two sections, so as to read the poem aloud where one half is read by one group and the other half is read by the other group thereby bringing a musical crescendo. Or if poems do not lend for such readings, then we may have to search for new poems that could be used in the class like the following ones:

Note

The following poem is written to be read aloud by two readers at once, one taking the left-hand part, the other taking the right-hand part. The poems should be read from top to bottom, the two parts meshing as in a musical duet. When both readers have lines at the same horizontal level, those lines are to be spoken simultaneously.

Grasshoppers

By Paul Fleischman

Sap's rising

*Grasshoppers are
hatching out
Autumn-laid eggs*

Young stepping

*Grasshoppers
Hopping
High
Grassjumpers
Jumping*

*Vaulting from
leaf to leaf
stem to stem
plant to plant*

*Leapers
Grass-
Bounders*

*Ground's warming
Grasshoppers are
hatching out*

Splitting

*into spring
Grasshoppers
Hopping*

*Grassjumpers
Jumping
Far*

*leaf to leaf
stem to stem
Grass-
Leapers*

Bounders

*Springers
Grass-
Soarers
Leapfrogging
Longjumping
grasshoppers.*

*Grass-
Springers

Soarers
Leapfrogging
Longjumping
grasshoppers.*

Reading a poem aloud cannot be and should not be substituted by any other activity. Due to the availability of information on everyone's smart phone, the facilitator need not exhaust the meaning of the poem through his/her explanation. The facilitator needs to explain so as to create an interest in the learner so that the learner would hunt for other resources and develop their own critical thinking in the process. When the facilitator thinks of exhausting the meaning of the poem through their teaching, it becomes an exercise curtailing the creativity of the learner.

Even for improving the writing skills, the following method can be adhered to by all the teachers who demand a written assignment as the first step towards developing written skills. The facilitator needs to chart the following as a path for the learner to travel:

Step 1: To collect various materials from various sources

Step 2: To read all the collected materials and mark the important things that you would like to include in your essay

Step 3: Rearrange whatever you have marked into a logical sequence from all the materials. Note that you are free to rearrange materials jumbling them to suit your need or idea.

Step 4: Rewrite the rearranged sentences in a logical order.

Step 5: Divide the rearranged sentences into groups so as to form a paragraph.

Step 6: Rewrite the entire essay by changing them into a single tense form. Usually Simple Present Tense can be preferred for a beginner.

Step 7: Underline all the key words and other common words that you think can be replaced with a synonym.

Step 8: Write all the synonyms provided for the underlined word from a Hard copy of The Roget's International Thesaurus. Here, learners should not venture to get synonyms from the online resources is a vital prohibition that one has to adhere to without any deviation.

Step 9: For all the synonyms identified from The Roget's International Thesaurus, the learner has to refer to a good dictionary, preferably an Oxford, a Cambridge, or an The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, and write down the meanings provided.

Step 10: Then the learner should identify the word that is much more closer in meaning to the original word of the text and substitute the original word with the new word.

Step 11: Rewrite the entire essay substituting the identified words.

Step 12: (For an advanced learner) To identify if the idea of the subject is the same for sentences in a paragraph and if they are same, different sentences could be connected using conjunctions or connectors and thus could be transformed into a single sentence.

Step 13: (For an advanced learner) To identify the nouns and substitute it with pronouns, wherever possible adhering to the rules of pronoun usage.

Step 14: Rewrite the entire transformed essay and submit it. (It has to be noted that the learner should be encouraged to submit all the process including his/her ruff work along with the final draft)

When all the lecturers adhere to such a demand from the student for all written assignments whether they are General English students or learners who are majoring in English, one can witness a change.

Another method would be to give quizzes to students in the following manner. The quizzes should only have a word as the answer and nothing more. The teacher announces the question twice giving 3 to 4 seconds for the learners to write the answer on a piece of paper and then collects it back. This kind of an exercise will drive students to pay more attention and develop listening skills. In such a quiz, it is advisable for the facilitator not to give more than 10 questions. This type could be employed for the paper Drama, where a short quiz can be given to the students, after each Act.

In addition, to encourage the development of reading skills, the facilitator ought to give an open book quiz before teaching each novel or a set of prose piece or a bunch of short stories. The students should be given the freedom to write whatever they want on the text itself, so that they can write the meanings of unknown words etc. A 60 minute class hour should be given 60 questions in the quiz where the questions will be MCQs, fill-in the blanks, match the following, one word answer, etc. It should be structured in a manner that the learner drops an answer each minute on the sheet of paper.

I hope the above workable suggestions can be easily adhered to and can be extended to appropriate papers with certain modifications to suit the demand at hand. In addition to the discussion, there is a pertinent question to be answered. We are exposed to English and most of us are learning it since our childhood and yet when one is given the advantages to be an undergraduate degree holder, one is unable to comfortably communicate through it. With all the modern technology inside the classroom, yet the products of any HEI find it hard at least to converse in English. This status is due to both the facilitator and the learner. The philosophy that a facilitator will offer the facilities but it is the choice of the learner to use them or not, can be more apt to the northern worlds but not to us who are in the southern worlds due to the psychic difference and the preferences. Therefore, to use northern or occidental modals and methods as modals on which we can shape our learning experience will be a grave mistake. However, one has to be true that most of the Roman Catholic Seminaries are very effective in teaching English within one year. They are able to achieve within one year what a three-year undergraduate degree or a four-year honors degree programme is unable to achieve. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to carefully look into the trainings imparted by them.

First of all, the Roman Catholic Seminaries function on the basic principle of reward and punishment where desired activities are rewarded reinforced and undesired activities are discouraged through various forms of reinforcement which can be grouped under an umbrella term 'punishment'. In the seminary, English becomes the language of the community during that entire year, and the young seminarians have no other option except to communicate through English at all times during that year whether be it sports, studies, jokes, recreation, or religious activities. Even their prayers are in English. Thus, a Roman Catholic Seminary creates an environment where their lifeworld is filled with English and nothing else and the learners are forced to use it. This creation of environment has to be strictly adhered to within the HEIs if one wishes to foster English. The HEIs should see that all announcements are made only through English in all its curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities and the trilingual or bilingual system of address has to be prohibited within its premises. The cafeteria or hostels should only screen English programmes on their television and even the radio should be tuned to English programmes. Each department should conduct cultural festivals where academic activity (i.e., paper presentation, poetry recitation, essay writing, short story writing, verse writing, etc) also becomes a part of it only through English and no other language and learners from other HEIs should participate in such events. At least if the above

mentioned changes can be institutionalized, there will be a tremendous transformation in the lives of the target audience during their undergraduate studies. Moreover, the cultural festivals also install other life-skills, such as event-management, fund-raising, accountability, fund-allotment, scheduling different activities, and etc which cannot be exploited by the student in real life situations without burning his/her fingers.

Concluding Remarks

This paper projects only a workable solution minimizing the technological infrastructure and technological dependency so as to be valid under any condition pointing towards workable solutions towards the betterment of the learner. One prominent remark would be the timings allotted for General English under various names as ESP/EAP courses. In some HEIs in Sri Lanka, the English program is a 2 credit or a 3 credit course work where a credit is made of 15 hours of direct contact between the facilitator and the learner. Thus, a 2-credit course will be for 30 hours and a 3-credit for 45 hours in a semester. It is pertinent to note that this time duration is insufficient for the facilitator to run many CAs and employ innovative techniques covering all aspects of teaching, learning, and testing. But in contra to Sri Lanka, in Tamil Nadu, a General English is for 90 hrs in a semester. The globalised model of converting everything into the unified or an umbrella system by the northern worlds will not profit the southern worlds and therefore, the systems in the southern worlds have to be evolved by those particular countries to suit their own needs and rationale, where learning from one another can render maximum profit.

Works Cited

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