Classroom Challenges in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This paper presents a review of recent trends, challenges and also the practice of English Language Teaching in India. It explores the current practices in an English Language Learning classroom and also the behavior of students in the classroom. The necessity of motivation in the process of learning a second language and also the benefits of a student centered classroom is being briefly brought out. While in the classroom peer group interaction and communication with the teacher in the target language provides opportunities for natural language use. The paper further discusses some of the key issues related to English Language Learning and Teaching. It reflects on how the teaching of English Language is in practice with prime focus on the benefits of a stress free atmosphere to enhance Language Learning.

Introduction

The role of a teacher in a Language Learning classroom is to communicate effectively and thereby provide opportunity for learners to practice communication. English Language Learners population continues to grow rapidly day by day since the necessity of learning the language has become inevitable. English being the world language also serves as the lingua franca for business education, political and technologic contexts. The demand for the language has redefined the role of English Language teachers; both in schools and colleges. The responsibility of a language teacher is vast and challenging. They must be skillful enough to monitor student performance and also be expert in providing comprehensible input in the target language.

Language Teaching Classroom

In India especially in rural colleges and other language teaching classes the students are made passive listeners. This behaviour is much associated to the traditional values of India. Students look upon teachers as authority figures and they find it uncomfortable to interrupt them with questions. This tendency is extended from their school days to a second language class even in graduate level. This can spoil the atmosphere of the language learning class resulting in no interaction between the learner and the teacher. Apart from this reason, students in the fear of committing mistakes

usually keep themselves quite. "Tan argued that the teachers were partly responsible as they usually expected predetermined correct answer from the students which stopped the students from experimenting with new ideas and the target language" (xie, 2010, p. 12). At the initial stages of language learning   teachers expecting correct and accurate answers from students can affect their learning. Instead a gradual   progress from minimal response to conversation can be pleasing in bringing out progress in language learners. Moving away from teacher centered language classrooms to student centered language classroom can help students to feel comfortable and ease which can in turn boost language acquisition. In a student centered classroom prevails a stress free environment where the teacher is less dominating and all individuals are equally participating. The topics for discussion in a student centered classroom hails from actual life situation which are much relevant to student lives, and topics that kindle their interests. The prime target of a student centered classroom is to make them acquire the language. Interaction in a L2 classroom between the teacher and the learner in the target language develops a healthy atmosphere in the classroom for L2 learning. Class room interaction "is not planned in advance, but rather is 'co produced' with the learners. In part, it will reflect the pedagogic decisions that have been taken, but it will also evolve as parts of the process of accomplishing the lesson. The interaction provides learners with opportunities to encounter input or to practice the L2." (Ellis, 1996, p. 573) Since second language acquisition occurs in the classroom content the nature of teacher talk plays a prime role in input. The role of class room discourses in a language learning class room is important that it develops a practical platform for both teachers and learners both in achieving the target language and in individual development. The topic worth discussion and topics that can create interest in the learner if discussed in the second language class can make the language learning process more cognitive oriented. "Cognitive abilities can be improved and that, given appropriate learning conditions, newly acquired skills will transfer to closely related academic tasks" (Ashman and Convey, 1997, p. 145) Interaction being a social phenomena can grab the attention and motivate students to take active participation in the class room.

Second language learners may vary on a number of dimensions such as motivation, personality, learning style and age. Understanding these differences inside the classroom can enable the teacher to get in to an individual's cognitive process. A dedicated second language learner will search for meaning in the L2 data they are exposed to and try to engage in real life communication by seeking out opportunities for natural language use.

Fossilization

The term fossilization during second language acquisition can be associated with permanent errors. Some errors during acquiring a second language gets repeated through the input; sometimes from the teacher. These errors get rooted in the same form resulting in fossilization. "The term fossilization has been used to label the process by which non-target forms become fixed in inter language" (Ellis, 1996, p. 353). In the process of learning a second language the learner lands in the midway between this mother tongue and the target language where further learning becomes impossible. This results in fossilization. The term language learning and language acquisition is being repeatedly used in the study of language learning. The term language learning is associated with second language and acquisition is usually associated with mother tongue. Krashen in his Monitor Model makes distinction between learning and acquiring a language. Krashen affirms that learning cannot be converted in to acquisition even through practice. But this view of Krashen is questioned by many linguists " McLaughlin (1978b), Rivers (1980), Stevick (1980), Sharwood- Smith (1981),and Gregg(1984) have all challenged

this position on the basis that when 'learnt' Knowledge is automatized through practice it becomes acquired" (Ellis, 1985, p. 264) Krashen defined acquisition as something that occurs subconsciously where the learners focus is on meaning rather than form. This way of acquiring can be associated with the way of learning mother tongue or L1. His definition of learning is that it is a conscious process.

"The utterances that the learner produces are treated as windows through which the internalized rule system can be viewed. In one sense, therefore SLA research is about performance; it looks at actual utterances" (Ellis, 1985, p. 6).The learner of a second language can be assessed through his performance. How close a learner is in producing or using the language efficiently like a native speaker shows his competence over second language. An early age exposure towards L2 learning will show strong association towards native like perfection. "Age effects have not only been observed for performance in a second language but also in the brain active patterns during second language processing" (Indefrey and Gullberg, 2006, p. 3).Samples of second language in written and oral form from Indian students reveal that years of exposure to the second language has not made them free from common errors. The comprehensible input to which they are exposed, plays a prime role in their process of acquiring a second language. Language learning cannot progress without some external input. In a L2 learning classroom the teacher constitute to be the source of input. The quality of input that a learner receives can enhance his learning process to move towards perfection while acquiring an L2. Errors that are born out of ignorance are usually being transmitted from the input source to the passive listener. Second language acquisition is based on the study of how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their mother tongue. In a broad perspective second language around the world, especially of developing countries is none other than English. English which has been accepted as the universal tongue has deepened its roots that without being able to communicate in this royal language, it has become too difficult to compete in this globalised world.

Participation inside the Classroom

Participation inside the classroom is a cognitive aspect of language acquisition. Participation reflects the amount of involvement, a language learner shows during his course of language learning. Right opportunity for participation in a language learning classroom can be made available through creating, interactive opportunities. Comprehensible output hypothesis claims that acquisition is promoted when there are opportunities for pushed output (Ellis, 1996, p. 594). Learners working in small groups tend to produce a greater and better quality of language than learners in drilled patterned classroom. Peer group interaction during language learning can create a situation where learners correct each other's mistakes. Tasks that require information exchange among peer groups enables learners to bring better output. Learners learn naturally in a communicative classroom setting. The role of a language teacher here is to create an ambience in the classroom to make learning an easy process.

Conclusion

 Learning a second language depends on the interest and involvement of the learner. A good Second language learner must be a risk taker and he should have the quality of adaptability. A Learner should have the willingness to commit himself to learn a second language and move towards perfection. The prime role of a teacher is to create a comfortable classroom environment i.e. to create an atmosphere free from stress and anxiety. Errors in the target language should not be highlighted in the class, further it should be seen as a part of the language acquisition process. Now it's a good sign that English language teachers around the country are becoming aware of their multitask and adapting themselves to the need of the day

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