

Pedagogical Aspects in Teaching and Learning EFL with A Cultural Perspective

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Introductionu

Culture and Language are indispensable to each other and cultural knowledge is an essential element in the teaching of any language. In the Indian context English is the second/foreign language and culture has a relevant impact in teaching and learning of English in the Indian scenario. The multicultural milieu of India requires understanding the wider perspective of teaching the English Language in the present context. Culture lends a specific meaning to the language and it is necessary to teach the language in a learner centric manner keeping in mind the cultural background to make teaching effective and achieve good results. Attaining English language proficiency has gained importance in this globalised world where people from diverse cultural backgrounds come together for communication and cooperation for mutual growth. This paper will examine the various nuances of the intercultural approach to teaching and learning of English Language in India.

Language and Culture

It is rightly said that our social lives are conducted through language and it is bound to culture in various ways. Thus, language symbolizes culture and is a social practice which reflects the inherent practices of a social group. The user of the language in the spoken or written form associates meaning to it by relating it to a particular group to which he belongs in the society. The encoding of the message which is culture specific leads to right interpretation of the language. Along with the

grammar and vocabulary the learner also needs to use the appropriate body language and tone while communicating in a specific social group which also has a deep impact on the message conveyed. English functions as a cross cultural language globally, form very purpose of a business, tourism, academics to a scientific research. [1] Thus, a language plays an essential role in determining the cultural identity of an individual.

Culture is the plethora of knowledge that people have about a particular society and it defines the way people live their lives in a social group. Culture defines the way people think and understand the world; it may vary according to regions or the social groups within a society. Culture lends a specific focus to language teaching and also helps to attach a wider perspective to improve the learning and understanding in the language class. It is well known that English language has become a common medium of transmission in the globalised world and it is necessary to gain proficiency in the language to articulate it according to the needs of a particular culture or society. Therefore, culture understanding has become an integral part of language learning.

“Culture can be defined as a membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history and common imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting.” [2]

Cultural Implications in Language Teaching/Learning

The study of culture brings forth the way people use different languages to give a wider view and this needs to be considered while teaching a language in that society. Language transfers culture from one area to another and vocabulary which is an important component of a language also varies according to culture. In this era of the COVID pandemic, there has been a massive explosion in the use of technology in teaching on the online platform with more focus on intercultural approach to language teaching and requires improvement in conventional teaching methods to make them more effective. Online teaching has also brought people from diverse cultural backgrounds on the same platform which

requires strategic planning by the language teacher to deliver the content of the language in the specific cultural context. It has been noted that culture has been integrated into the 'communicative curriculum' to ensure better understanding of the language in any scenario:

“While acknowledging the obvious importance of language as a means of communicating information, the advocates of an intercultural approach also emphasize its social functions; for example the ways in which language is used by speakers and writers to negotiate their place in social groups and hierarchies..... the intercultural learner ultimately serves as a mediator between different social groups that use different languages and language varieties.” [3]

The intercultural approach to language teaching also helps in development and improvement in language learning and promotes the understanding of the culture and proper mediation. Teaching the English language follows a multidisciplinary approach due to wide usage of the language. Culture is an amalgam of different aspects including behavior, thoughts, values, attitudes, traditions and the psyche of the people of a particular region. It has a wide impact on the various perspectives of ELT in the language classroom as the teacher gives an insight into the cross cultural psychology and the cultural knowledge about the native speakers of the language. The learners integrate this knowledge with the values, attitudes and mindset of their own society and develop an understanding of the language in their native context. Claire and Widdowson in their book *Language and Culture* (1998) stated that educating students for use of English as a 'Lingua Franca' is equally developing their intercultural sensibility. It is educating students to make use of English as a lingua franca for developing their intercultural sensitivity. It makes an allowance too for them to get to know a number of different cultural outlooks and perspectives. [4]

The study of culture also helps to avoid misinterpretation of the target language by the learners. Literature, drama movie adaptation, songs etc. have been found to be very effective in introducing the learners to

the culture of the native speakers and drawing comparisons between the native culture and the culture of the ESL learners.

Techniques for Imparting Culture the ESL Classrooms

India is a country of diverse cultures, the English teacher needs to understand the socio-cultural background of the learners while delivering in the language classroom so that learners respond and understand the language with culture focused perspective. Teaching a foreign language without introducing the learners to the socio cultural milieu of the origin of that language makes learning incomplete. Learning English language with focus on being better communicators needs to enhance the understanding of the learner so that they can use the learnt language to communicate clearly in the social scenario with focus on cultural aspects to avoid any misinterpretation. Learner should be trained to master the cultural context of the language by exposure to literature of the native speakers which aptly reflects the societal culture and learners learn to comprehend the meaning in a better manner with cultural implications.

Another way in which culture can be introduced in the language classroom is by interactive communication activities where multiple stories and instances from the target culture can be narrated and the learners can be asked to comprehend them in their context. They may also be asked to participate in role plays depicting the culture of the language learnt. It is essential that the teachers of ESL adopt innovative techniques for integrating culture in the language classroom. Another technique is adopting news media for developing communicative competence in the culture specific manner which can help the learners to link to the social happenings of the native speakers to their own social experiences which can be discussed orally with the language teachers. Use of news media will enhance the listening, reading and speaking skills of learners in a culture specific aspect and the internet can be used in an effective manner to access the English news.

“As we all know language is not a natural phenomenon but a creation of man’s social needs. Hence each society depends as much on

language as on air and water for its survival. The moment we think of communication in a society, we cannot help thinking instantly about language and media..... The fact that this media mirrors the society is itself adequate to use it invariably in the ELT classrooms.....” [5]

The teacher can also use a comparison method by showing movies or documentaries depicting the target culture and also the culture of native speakers to involve the learners in cross-cultural understanding of the use of language especially in adaptations of movies or novels from the target culture by the natives. Comparative literature study can also be an active devise to promote cultural understanding amongst students as they have a better understanding of the literature of the first language and when they read and interpret the literature of the second language they are able to draw the relation between both literatures. It also helps the learners in evaluating the difference in the target culture and their own culture while understanding the language in the classroom. The teachers can also hold discussions comparing the differences depicted in the cultures through the movie adaptations/ documentaries etc. Students can be introduced to idioms/ proverbs of the native language and their usage by the native speakers and a comparison may be drawn between the first language proverbs/idioms to assimilate culture. The teachers may also point out the ‘Indianism’ in the English Language and the common errors that occur due to the native impact which can help the learners to improve their language skills. Students can be given project work to highlight these literary adaptations which enhance the interest in learning the language in the cultural context.

When the students learn to listen, read, write and speak the language in the cultural context all skills need to be worked upon in the classrooms to enhance the understanding. Writing activity can help to enhance language learning in the classrooms, as rightly said by Linda Harklan –

“ESL writing classrooms serve as arenas for cultural orientation.....Culture is an elusive construct that shifts constantly over time and according to who is perceiving or interpreting it.....The resulting ‘representations’ of culture appear both implicitly and explicitly in the work of ESL writing classrooms.” [6]

Writing activities improve the ability of the learners as they use vocabulary and language articulation skills to convey meaningful information according to their perception of the language, such understanding of the text can be culture specific as they comprehend and write on topics related to the native language. The cultural manifestations in writing assignments indicate the better learning of the students and also help the teacher to judge the ability of the learners.

Reading also helps the readers to develop cultural awareness therefore the learners can be motivated to read and discuss the literature as per their understanding of the culture. Silent reading activities which are followed by critical discussions on varied topics depicting the culture can be conducted in the classrooms. The teacher may introduce the students to the topics from history, geographical perspectives, economical or social issues that reflect culture and discuss with students to know their reactions on the concerned topics to inculcate interest in the culture of the target language. Listening activities can also be conducted in the classrooms where students are motivated to listen to the news, songs etc. of the target culture and interpret them according to their understanding in the cultural context. The students also develop the ability to assimilate culture of the target language with their own cultural experiences as they listen to the way the language is framed and spoken by the native speakers. The teachers also need to be trained to assimilate culture through various techniques to make the language class effective and meaningful for the language learners.

Conclusion

As a consequence, the learning of the cultural patterns of the target language enables the students to gain complete proficiency in English and become global communicators. Students training in the various professional arenas are highly benefitted through this technique as they become ready to face people from diverse cultures round the world through their effective communication skills. Teaching the students from diverse cultures of the Indian subcontinent requires a thorough approach for teaching ESL and incorporation of intercultural communicative

approach is a key to developing complete competency in the language. Teaching is a transformational process and adopting creative techniques and innovative use of technology can bring a big change in the efficiency of the language learner.

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