

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN LARGE CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

It is the large classroom, which has remained an area of concern for the teacher of English for a long time. Thus, as we all know, is one of the major problems of our education system whether it is primary, secondary or tertiary level. It has been made solely responsible for the lack of quality in a class and the excuse for many ills. We, English teachers, often complain that students are not serious in their study. On the other hand, students find language classes boring. Through this paper, my purpose is to report an experiment that was conducted in a large class of First Year BA. compulsory English in SPT. Arts and Science College, Godhra in which the principles of Communicative language teaching were used.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalization significant changes have been observed in India, particularly in the last decade of the twentieth century. Their impact is clearly visible on the education system too. The very face of the classroom and the teaching learning process are affected by the dynamism of liberalization and globalization. In this changed scenario the teacher's role has become more challenging while the learner can no longer remain passive in the class. Gone are the days when in the classroom they had very little role to play. Today's teaching and learning process demands an active learner in the classroom.

This new role of a learner can address one of the major problems of English teacher i.e. of the large classes where teaching proves to be a nightmare. In the large class the teacher finds himself baffled and helpless. He does not know what to do in the crowded class and how to motivate learners... All his strategies and techniques turn to be a failure. As K.K. McLeod, in his report no-7, entitled What teachers cannot do in large classes has mentioned, the teachers in large classes are unwilling to work and are not happy with the classroom situation. But the most compelling charge against large classes is the feeling that the teaching here will not be effective.

This is the harsh reality of the Indian classroom. All the imported approaches, methods and techniques remain ineffective because they are not modified keeping in

view the needs of the Indian classroom. On the other hand, there is the fear that the syllabus may not be completed in the stipulated time. Then, there is no alternative left for the English teacher except to use grammar-translation method in a lecture-delivering mode. And if the output of such teaching is evaluated then we come to know that our students are able only to cope with the demands of examination. Neither are the learners confident in the use of English, nor are they motivated for further study. This situation remains the same throughout India.

ENGLISH IN GUJARAT

In Gujarat, the student begins to study English from class IV and continues it up to class IX as a compulsory subject. At the high school level he is given two options either to choose Hindi or English. With the result, a few students, particularly in the urban areas, opt for English while in rural areas majority of students opt for Hindi to pass their class X and XII examinations

At the undergraduate level English is introduced as a compulsory subject. In the colleges of Gujarat University two types of English courses are introduced at the first year and the second year B.A. level: 'A' stream for those who have opted for English in class XII and 'B' stream for those who have passed their XII examinations without English and at the third year B.A level there is no streaming.

that of the level. The overall aim of the course is to enrich learners' written and verbal expressions. Herein comes English teacher's turn who has to cope up with the problem of a large class in a limited time but not in so limited class. He is haunted by his inability to give more attention to his pupils.

With the result, the classes of B- stream are found comparatively larger than A-stream classes. Each class has approximately 80 to 100. The course contents such as grammatical items (tense; articles and prepositions), vocabulary, and composition etc.. prescribed for both the streams remain the same. The only difference here is that of the level. The overall aim of the course I to enrich learner's written and verbal expressions. Herein comes English teacher'swho has to cope up with the problem of a large class in a limited time but not in so limited class. He is haunted by his inability to give more attention to his pupils.

EXPERIMENTAL STRATEGIES

An experiment was conducted with the students of B-stream of my college, that is, SPT Arts and Science College, Godhra, focussing on the problem of teaching in a large classroom.

Mike Wallace in his report Reflective Model in Teacher's Education (1991) teachers urges to reflect on experimental knowledge, which will help them to grow and put the theories into practice and also to think about why something has happened and how it could be improved.

No doubt we are constrained by the syllabus prescribed. Generally decisions relating to the curriculum matters like deciding on syllabus- content and evaluation procedures are taken as a result of reflection and deliberation over a period of time and are seldom taken by a teacher individually. However implementation of the syllabus is the teacher's business and even that requires reflection. Reflective decision, like day to day planning of teaching can be taken by the individual teacher.

In an attempt to make teaching effective and meaningful in the large classroom we carefully went through the prevailing teaching methods and several approaches in the field of English language teaching which provided us enough insight reaching the conclusion that the

Communicative approach, the amalgam of different methods of language teaching, could be the best possible alternative while dealing with the problems of a large class. It is a common belief that Communicative language teaching could successful only in small classes but we endeavored to use some of its principles in the first year B.A. class Moreover, our successful effort with the use of communicative approach with a small and specific group of Functional English' students also encouraged us to use it in the large classrooms, though with some alterations.

While teaching in a big compulsory English class, the teacher has to be extra careful because his learners, who have opted for different subjects, have totally different needs and objectives from one another. The only positive point we observed was that each one wanted to be an effective communicator of English. That is the reason we decided to make necessary changes, which were based on our experience of teaching in B-stream class for many years. The following are the changes made.

1. Learners of B -stream are generally branded as failures as they had already left studying English a couple of years ago. In the college, they are faced with the prospect of learning what they fear most. In order to help them in getting over this fear not only rapport has to be established with them but also it has to be demonstrated to them that they can learn this language even at a slower pace at least in the initial stage. The use of learners' first language (L) enables them to learn English language though haltingly. The purpose is to overcome. Their fear and demonstrate to them that learning for them. still possible Therefore, the judicious use of learners' first language should be made in the classroom. It is an asset for the teacher to know learners' first language. Those teachers, who are not able to speak learners' first language, may not establish/good rapport with the learners.
2. In the beginning the teacher avoid using English thoroughly because learners scared.
3. Instead of dividing students in A and B streams it is better to make the class heterogeneous. It means (both that A-stream students Gujarati and English medium ones) should be used in the B- stream class

4. To ensure the maximum participation of learners they should be divided into several groups and groups must be made heterogeneous.
5. Students must be encouraged sufficiently to take part in the classroom activities. In the beginning they should be allowed to express themselves in any language. Here, the purpose is to make them vocal and shed away their inhibitions.
6. Gradually, they should be persuaded to use English at their disposal and the teacher should constantly encourage them to use English without bothering about their mistakes.
7. The teacher should pretend to ignore the mistakes. It does not mean that the teacher will have no say in their mistakes. The teacher must discuss their mistakes in general but without pointing out the individual learner,
8. Instead of giving them rules of different grammatical items directly the teacher should provide them with a good number of So that, examples. they themselves will make rules for using the particular item.
9. The examples should be given to them in meaningful situations. If necessary, drills and practice could also be given to them but not in a mechanical way.
10. Learners should also be shown the difference between Gujarati and English language structures. It is of paramount importance as they first think in Gujarati and then try to translate in English.
11. English should be taught as a skill rather than as a content subject.
12. It was also decided to teach grammar as a whole instead of them different teaching grammatical items in isolation.

EXPERIMENT

The first and foremost task was to create the right learning atmosphere or the readiness for learning. For this the learners were divided into a few by heterogeneous groups simply shifting the sitting arrangement of some learners. Each group had 8 to 10 students. Some bright and outspoken students were appointed as group leaders. Their job was to help other students, who were not confident, to discuss the doubts in the groups and also to approach the teacher in case they were not able to find the solution to the particular

problem. Moreover, not reshuffled the were groups frequently as they are changed in other interactive classrooms, barring a few exceptions.

Firstly, they were asked to introduce themselves to their group members) and also talk of their hobbies and dislikes, their future plan etc. The information gathered was used for giving examples for teaching different items of the course contents such as tense. One example is given here. For teaching the present simple tense, first of all, the teacher explained his daily routine, which was followed by group work. In their groups the leaders and other A-stream students were asked to explain their routines while others were asked to listen to them carefully, to note down points if needed and follow them. Here, the listening gave them the required boost and as a result, they also somehow tried to explain their day-today affairs. The group leaders were asked to ensure the participation of each learner in the discussion and also give him or her suggestions. Some of them were found very shy and were not ready to say anything in the class. So they were allowed to speak in their first language. Later on, they were asked to explain the routine of their group members. (Here the emphasis was on the practice of third person singular.) Apart from the practice of simple present tense, their regarding prepositions and articles confusions were also clarified. Frequently, they were assured that if they made a mistake, it would be marked as a sign of improvement. In the same way they were taught past simple tense by asking them to discuss for example how they spent their weekends etc. The purpose behind the discussion on these topics was to get them speaking in the class and to identify their weakness in order to supply them appropriate language and also to sustain their interest in the class activities.

In the syllabus the emphasis was on reading and writing skills. Once they started co-operating with one another, passages for comprehension were given to them. They were asked to read the passages silently and try to understand what has said in the passage by discussing with their group members. Then, they were asked to answer the questions that followed. Later on, they discussed responses in the class.

In the same way they were given practice in composition, letter writing and other prescribed items. The teacher's job was to initiate the discussion and then to act as a facilitator. During the activities the teacher

spent some time with each group, listened to them and gave suggestions.

OBSERVATIONS MADE

1. In the beginning it seemed to be a noisy classroom because the students were not familiar with group activities. Gradually, the work became smoother and they started enjoying the activities.
2. During group work it was noticed that learners were not hesitant to discuss or voice their problems with other members of their groups. The group leaders played a vital role and acted as a link between the other students and the teacher because some of the learners were found too shy to address their doubts to their teachers.
3. Students of A-stream were also found satisfied explaining, different grammatical because by

concepts to other students they could brush up their knowledge.

4. Some students seemed uncomfortable with the first few to be activities. But through the constant prodding from the teacher and their group members, they could take part in the group activities. However, sometimes they were found using their mother tongue with the sprinkling of some English words.

CONCLUSION

Here the purpose is not to make any tall claim that the experiment was completely successful. But by using this method we could not only create interest in the learners but also sustain it for a long time. Classes were no longer boring and one sided for them. In the end, it can be said that the use of this approach helped us in drawing responses from all the corners of the class and also provided learners with an opportunity to take part actively in the classroom.

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