

RESEARCH ARTICLE



## IMPARTING LIFE SKILLS TO UNDERGRADUATES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LAB: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

Language learning is interlinked with a wide array of skills and consequently has innumerable benefits. It makes one articulate, self confident and enhances self esteem. It is possible to link language learning with imparting life skills by using quotes and excerpts from various genre with the objective of enabling the learner to develop his/her social, emotional and cognitive skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, improve interpersonal relations, develop positive attitude, be empathetic and think logically and creatively.

Life skills are defined by WHO as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” Exposure to these skills brings about a behavioural change in the learners and addresses a balance of knowledge, attitude and skills, thus meeting the ultimate aim of education which is overall development of personality. Thus this paper looks at innovative uses of quotes and excerpts that can be used creatively by the language teacher to enhance language as well as life skills in the English Language Lab.

**Key words:** Language Learning, Effective Communication, Life Skills, Quotes and Excerpts

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching language skills and enabling learners to communicate effectively in English is the primary objective of a language teacher. However, in addition to these skills, language teachers can also impart the much needed life skills to the young and impressionable learners. Life skills are a set of human skills that prompt and motivate individuals towards positive and constructive behaviours such as thinking critically, creatively and solving problems. These human skills also include communicating effectively, empathizing with others, building and nurturing healthy relationships and effectively managing the demands and challenges of everyday life.

In today's competitive work scenario, an employee with only technical or subject knowledge is not likely to sustain and grow professionally. To be an asset to an organization, one has to work on self improvement by imbibing important life skills because they enable one to present oneself well, cope with stressful situations, learn to prioritize when faced with multiple tasks, and finally develop the ability to express oneself befittingly in various situations.

Such skills need be developed over a stretch of time. They cannot abruptly spring into existence when one faces a challenge for example, joining a new company. So, in the words of Stephen Covey, it is necessary to "begin with the end in mind"(98). In the context of students, they can be helped to become industry ready right from the very beginning, and what can be a more suitable place for this purpose than the English language lab?

Language skills and life skills can also be imparted using a variety of teaching tools for instance through quotes or excerpts from various genres which could be taken from audio, visual, print and other forms of multimedia. For example the inspirational PowerPoint Presentation titled *The Song of the Bird* was used to teach the importance of appreciating and valuing what one possesses or owns. The audio visual clip also conveys the power of language and makes one marvel at the impact of felicity of expression.

This paper lays emphasis on one of the most important aspects of life skills which is communicating effectively. It is a skill we can learn

and if we are willing to make the effort to enhance these skills, we can surely improve the quality of our lives. Given below are some of the uses of quotes and excerpts in an ELT classroom:

### A. Effective Communication

Effective communication enables us to express ourselves verbally and non-verbally in ways that are appropriate to our culture and situation. Quotes or excerpts can be used to highlight one of the features of effective communication viz. appropriate manner of speaking. For example:

- *A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.* Proverbs 25: 11, New International Version. 1984.
- *Kind words are the music of the world.* F. W .Faber

Learners can express the themes embedded in the above lines, through a skit or narration of a story. They could also share a quote which conveys the same thought for example:

*Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.* Mother Teresa

### B. Interpersonal Relationships: "Everything you do or say is public relations." Anon

There is a close interconnection between communication and human relationships. The inability to communicate competently can be disastrous for a relationship. One needs to make an effort to be understood, and if necessary rephrase or clarify, rather than blaming others for not understanding what is being said. This skill of reaching others effectively has to be practised day in and day out. It cannot be suddenly developed overnight, for instance the day before an important interview.

Efficient communication skills enhance self esteem, self confidence, and leadership skills. It also improves healthy interpersonal relationships which involve taking care to value one's self and as well as others. To increase an awareness of the importance of interpersonal relationships the teacher can use quotes in different activities. For instance, the lines given below could be used as topics for Group Discussion or Role Play.

- *Have the courage to be sincere, clear and honest. This opens the door to deeper*

communication all around. It creates self-empowerment and the kind of connections with others we all want in life. Sara Paddison

- *We build too many walls and not enough bridges.* Isaac Newton

### C. Brevity of Expression

One of the main reasons for using quotes to teach language as well as life skills is that it can be done successfully, using minimal amount of time and the least number of words. Quotes will be acceptable to the students since they strike home their message in a brief but powerful manner. Lengthy discourses on the contrary, are tedious, time consuming and cumbersome. Concise quotes on the other hand have an immediate effect and greater impact on the reader. They encapsulate great wisdom in a few words and can serve as topics for brief presentations.

Examples:

- *Who, being loved, is poor?* Oscar Wilde
- *You are your choices.* Seneca

### D. To Motivate and Inspire

The very brevity of quotes and the fact that they are packed with meaning, make them an effective tool for teaching language in the English Language Lab. The bonus is that they not only teach language but that they are also useful for a plethora of reasons such as motivating, inspiring and character building. The various possible techniques that can be used include using the quotes or excerpts given to share an inspiring anecdote or an inspirational biography.

Examples:

- *Yesterday I dared to struggle. Today I dare to win.* Bernadette Devlin
- *Better three hours too soon, than one minute too late.* William Shakespeare
- *Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.* William James
- *A single rose can be my garden... a single friend, my world.* Leo Buscaglia

### E. To Inculcate Positive Attitudes

To learn and master a language and face life's biggest challenges can be very daunting. However, positive attitudes can be inculcated through exposure to quotes that highlight courage, hope, optimism, perseverance, etc. In

his book **Greatness Manual**, Rabison Shumba quotes Norman Vincent Peale as saying, "The person who sends out positive thoughts activates the world around him positively and draws back to himself positive results"(84). Examples of quotes that can have a constructive effect are given below:

- *Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow".* Mary Anne Radmacher
- *Our greatest glory is in never falling, but in getting up every time we do.* Confucius
- *Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark.* George Iles
- *Hope is not a dream, but a way of making dreams become reality.* Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens
- *Think positively and masterfully, with confidence and faith, and life becomes more secure, more fraught with action, richer in experience and achievement.* Edward Rickenbacker
- *Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results.* Willie Nelson
- *Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves.* James M. Barrie

These lines can be used as inspiration for well thought out problem solving exercises given by the teacher. Or the learners themselves can link the given lines regarding facing life's challenges in a positive manner with the lives of those who solved problems in the community for example Mother Teresa.

Quotes which impart important life lessons, not in a didactic, moralizing, judgmental manner, but in a way that convey powerful thoughts with subtlety and beauty of expression leave a lasting impression in the learners' mind. For instance, aspects of success are conveyed skillfully in the following quotes:

- *If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things.* Albert Einstein

- *That some achieve great success, is proof to all that others can achieve it as well.* Abraham Lincoln
- *Nothing builds self-esteem and self-confidence like accomplishment.* Thomas Carlyle

The learners will be asked to relate these lines to the lives of great achievers who they admire for example: APJ Abdul Kalam.

**F. To Bring about Attitudinal Change**

Even words, statements, slogans have had a strong impact and have brought about attitudinal changes as evidenced by the lines mentioned below:

- *Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains.* Karl Marx
- *Liberty Equality Fraternity.* – French Revolution /Rousseau
- *Quit India!* Slogan of freedom fighters during the Indian’s struggle for Independence

In pairs or small groups, learners can try and recall famous slogans of their choice and share their thoughts and interpretations.

A video clip that highlights the importance of team work in professional life can be given as food for thought to enable students to garner points for discussion. Topics that relate to attitudinal change can also be given for debating. Eg:

- Can corruption be totally weeded out of society?

Quotes can have a transformational effect on the learners and prepare them to face life’s adverse situations boldly. Some quotes, such as those given below can serve as starting points in preparing a Presentation on characters who faced great challenges and yet succeeded magnificently, for example, Helen Keller. Given below are a few quotes which can be used to bring about an attitudinal change in the learners.

- *"Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you; they're supposed to help you discover who you are."* Bernice Johnson Reagon
- *"The key to life is accepting challenges. Once someone stops doing this, he's dead."* Bette Davis

- *"Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional."* Roger Crawford

In order to ascertain whether quotes chosen by them have had a positive impact on the students, English teachers can use certain strategies like the ones mentioned below:

**i) Say it in a Word**

One way is by asking the students to identify the main theme of quotes given to them. This could be done on a regular basis. For example:

Instruction: Express the essence or main idea of the quotes given below in a word or phrase:

- *Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.* Theodore Roosevelt
- *We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.* Aristotle
- *What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters compared to what lives within us.* Ralph Waldo Emerson
- *A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.* Mahatma Gandhi
- *A man is what he thinks about all day long.* Ralph Waldo Emerson
- *You can't climb the ladder of success dressed in the costume of failure.* Zig Ziglar

**ii) List Values and Skills**

Students were asked to brainstorm and list out the most important human values and share it with others. For example:

Instruction: Work in pairs and list out what in your opinion are the most important values and skills necessary for you to succeed in life.

- .....
- .....
- .....

Thus this simple strategy provides students with an opportunity to reflect on how they can respond positively to the changing trends in society. It also proves how English teachers can be proactive instruments of change.

In the words of Steven Covey:

*Proactive people focus on issues within their circle of influence. They work on*

things they can do something about. The nature of their energy in doing this is positive, enlarging and magnifying. They increase their Circle of Influence (83).

The teacher can creatively use quotes in an ELT classroom to impart language skills and life skills by utilizing realia, pictures, songs, lyrics, poems, speeches, stories and information technology which is so much a part of our world. This could be done by asking the learner to express the main idea of the realia, songs, lyrics etc in a word or phrase and then search for another appropriate quote that conveys his/her idea.

### iii) Realia

The learner may be shown a real object for e.g. a flower. The response could be Beauty, Colour or Nature and this can be expressed by the learner through quotes, for e.g.

- Even the most beautiful roses have thorns.- Unknown
- Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher. William Wordsworth

### iv) Multimedia:

Multimedia can be used judiciously to arouse interest in the learners. This can be done in various ways for instance:

#### a) Pictures

Quoting Walt Disney, Priscille Dando points out: "Of all of our inventions for mass communication, pictures still speak the most universally understood language"(73). Learners can be shown various pictures and a list of quotes. They are then asked to match the pictures with the given quotes. Language skills can be enhanced by also asking them to express their interpretation of the pictures provided in a line or two and then give suitable titles to each of them.

#### b) Songs and Rendering of poems

The teacher needs to carefully choose a verse from a meaningful song or an excerpt from a poem that helps the learner to understand life and shed light on how to be a better human being. For example in the song **Hero**, Mariah Carey sings that when it feels that hope is gone,

"Look inside you and be strong  
And you'll finally see the truth  
That a hero lies in you."

A father's advice and concern for his son in the poem **If** by Rudyard Kipling and Polonius' advice to his son in **Othello** provide guidance to lead a successful life by emphasizing the importance of various life skills.

### v) Speeches

Audio visual clips of famous speeches (for example the **I Have Dream** speech or **Tryst with Destiny** speech) are not only examples of exquisite use of language but they also provide innumerable examples of enhancing the quality of our lives.

### CONCLUSION

This paper looked at how a judicious use of quotes can expand vocabulary, increase fluency and enable one to use the most appropriate word in a situation as Abraham Lincoln observed, "it is a pleasure to be able to quote lines to fit any occasion" (273).

Since the use of quotes makes learning interesting, leading to greater cooperation, they can be used as an efficient tool to impart not only language learning but also the much needed life skills and moral values in ELT classrooms. Such practice will make it possible to meet the objectives of Education viz. drawing out the best in the learner by nourishing good qualities, teaching critical thinking and helping learners to become responsible citizens who will use their values to guide their attitudes and behaviour.

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