RESEARCH ARTICLE

FABRICATING THE LEARNING STYLES TO MEET THE 21ST CENTURY LANGUAGE NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

There is an old Chinese proverb "Buy a child a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats it every day". Applied to the language teaching and learning field, this proverb might be interpreted to mean that if students are provided with answers, the immediate problem is solved. But if they are taught the strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they are empowered to manage their own learning. "Language learning strategy often significantly helps learners to attain greater proficiency by making the learning process easier, more efficient, and more self-directed" (Oxford: 1989). However, most students often fail to invoke strategic behaviours effectively. Consequently, the need to evolve a strategy to help them in their learning has become all the more important

The objective of this paper is to enumerate the fact that the fabrication of learning styles in accordance with the 21st Century language needs would enhance the communication skills of the professional graduates thereby making them globally competent. Listening, speaking, reading and writing aspects form an integral part of a language acquisition, the mastery of which is pivotal in making English language communication possible. To state this point of view more clearly need based task, imbibing all the four criteria is fabricated and executed on the learners. The input selected for this process is a set of inspirational and motivational stories downloaded from www.academictips.org. A bunch of ten stories one on each sheet is taken as a handout for the process. The participants in the study included are engineering students. The study touched upon the following main components:
1. Identification of students' approach to learning and their existing learning strategies.
2. Practical impact of multiple interventions on achievements for these students.
The findings culminated in an enriched teaching learning model which maximised engineering students' performance in English quite significantly.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization demands professionals with communicative competency and ability to work in diverse settings which welcomed a drastic change in the teaching and learning of English giving more prominence to the creative, pragmatic and interaction oriented methodology. In this context, the English teachers of Engineering colleges have a very crucial role to play. Besides teaching English as a subject for comprehension and expression, they have to act as facilitators in shaping the communication skills of the Engineering students.

This professional challenge could be met with some extra effort and fresh commitment from the part of a teacher in English in getting to know the heterogeneous levels of students' thereby designing suitable materials in connection to the prescribed syllabus and administering appropriate tasks. Independent learning is not a simple matter of student autonomy in learning. Rather it involves developing an atmosphere which gives students the space, support, and encouragement to become reflective and confident learners. English teachers should remould the existing unitary teacher-centered pattern of language teaching by introducing a variety of new language tasks. These tasks should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, facilitate mobilizing the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the current position of students and the leading role of teachers.

This realization has prompted the researcher to identify the set of competencies required by the students and their promotion through language tasks. The study has important implications in developing students' communication skills through the implementation of language task in teams as an innovation. This approach involves the students to do meaningful tasks using the target language, English. Fabricating learning styles in accordance with the 21st Century language needs would enhance the communication skills of the professional graduates thereby making them globally competent. To state this point of view more clearly need based task, imbibing LSRW skill practice is tailored and executed on the learners. The input selected for this process is a set of inspirational and motivational stories downloaded from www.academictips.org. It is administered on IV B.Tech students of EEE branch to measure the outcome.

A bunch of six stories one on each sheet is taken as a handout for the process. Students are divided into six teams with ten students each. Each team is given a story hand out. Now that all the teams are ready they are instructed to follow the directions of the trainer to execute the task. The task is operated in four phases covering the LSRW skill practice. In the first phase students are asked to read and comprehend the story passing the sheet among the team mates so that each student on an average gets two minutes to skim and scan the text. The first phase thus is operated for duration of twenty minutes. After the first phase is done students are instructed to recollect the story and put it in their own words individually for which they are allotted fifteen minutes time. After the second phase is completed all the teams are asked to swap the sheets among themselves and rate their peers' performance on a scale of ten for which a duration of fifteen minutes is allocated. Now that everyone has completed evaluation process each team is asked to announce best score. The best scorers from the six teams are asked to narrate the story for five minutes in their own words and the rest of the class is instructed to listen attentively to rate the best performer. The task took 90 minute operational time for execution. All the readings are noted in the specific formats designed for the task.

This learning style, tailored to meet the 21st century language needs, is executed with optimum student participation through a variety of learning exposure. In practice this approach is recognized as an effective means of developing students' language output by applying time bound LSRW tasks. Coincidentally, the basic concepts of communication like one to one interaction, corporative learning, team building, and presentation skills are applied and improved. During the process, students identified a wide range of learning processes and outcomes. They said to have learned how to engage in teamwork and how to collaborate with colleagues. Peer interaction emerges as a source of motivation.

Since most of the students are from regional (Telugu) medium background and they also are the first generation learner they exhibited low level of proficiency in the writing and speaking. But their interest and zeal for improving speaking skills is evident. Fabricating the learning style with a purposeful task will enable the following characters:

- Integrates speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills;
- Incorporates collaborative team work
- Builds interpersonal skills

- Engages learners in independent work
- Challenges learners to use English in new and different contexts outside the class
- Leads to clear outcomes; and
- Incorporates self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation

According to Wilkin (1991:63), "Adults like to be in charge of what they do. They usually know where they want to go but may need a hand in getting there." Training will offer that hand to the learners. Teacher should act as a facilitator encouraging learners to rely on their own expertise, reflect on their strength and weaknesses, and support them as they learn for themselves how to be teachers. It is through sharing their experiences with their peers, that they gain confidence in articulating their feelings. It has been claimed that chances of genuine reflection taking place is greater in a climate where "learners and facilitators feel accepted and non-defensive, open to risk taking, learning and feedback; where dissent is not merely tolerated but encouraged; where emotional as well as intellectual responses are valued; and where there is balance between high energy and low energy moments" (Hammond and Collins, 1991: 25).

*"A teacher who is attempting to teach
without inspiring the pupil with a desire
to learn is hammering on cold iron."
-- Horace Mann*

The need of the hour is to gear up engineering students for the job market by teaching them job-oriented English language skills. Teachers should also remember that they are not merely teachers of grammar; they are expected to play the role of 21st century skills trainers. They should teach English as a life skill and this is how they can do justice to their profession.

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