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Importance of Teachers' Competence in Designing Classroom Activities to Teach Grammar to Higher Secondary Students in Maharashtra

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Abstract: English is a language which has great reach and influence. Teaching the English language in Indian classrooms has always been a challenging exercise. The reasons for the difficulty in developing an effective strategy to teach English as a second language in Indian classrooms seem to be diverse and not easily specifiable. Teachers are required to be innovative in dealing with the specific barriers to effective learning by the students. While there have been a variety of strategies proposed, the use of classroom activities is one of the methods favoured by teachers. Classroom activities enhance the learners' participation in the language learning process even as they provide much-needed motivation. Some activities will not work in every language-teaching situation but in that situation, teachers must be more creative. The paper will discuss the need of teachers' competency in designing classroom activities for teaching grammar to improve language skills.

Key Words: Task-based language teaching (TBLT), Grammar Classroom Activities, Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), Teaching and Learning Grammar Problems.

Introduction:

English is known as a world language because of its vast presence in the world. To survive in the world of competition students need to be competent in the English language. To achieve competency in any language, it is very important to get command over language skills. Four language skills are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Grammar is a vital part of the language. To learn the language as a second language learner, it is necessary to understand and apply the grammar of the language. To learn a foreign language, students have to take separate efforts in learning the grammar of that language because it is not an intuitive process like their mother tongue.

Grammar is important to develop a person's ability to handle the structural patterns of his language. In 1954 W. Nelson Francis offered the word grammar which means the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged to convey large meaning. The meaning of the word



“grammar” is “linguistic etiquette.” Grammar involves the structure of a language. Grammar is one of the most difficult aspects of a foreign language to master. It is defined as “the rules that govern how a language’s sentences are formed” (Thronbury, 2000, P.1). English grammar has been traditionally viewed as "a system of the syntax that decides the order and patterns in which words are arranged sentences” (Close,1982P.13).

All languages have grammar, and each has its own grammar. Four skills of language base on its grammar. The English language also has its own grammar. Native speakers of the English language have language proficiency because they intuitively know the grammar system of that language. They already know English grammar but sometimes they do not necessarily know the different rules behind it. On the other hand English as second language learners, students learn grammar rules but they are facing difficulties while applying them in speaking and writing skills of the English language. Most of the time students as second language learners focus on grammar rules. They just try to memorize the grammar rules and try to recall it in exam but in the process of rules memorization, most of the higher secondary students do not try to understand usages. Some of them may not be able to remember the rules in an exam and those who able to apply it in an exam, not necessary to able to use it in language skills like speaking and writing. They give more importance to structure than application. Many higher secondary students are structurally competent but not competent in speaking. Grammar rules may help to learn the language but to get command over speaking skill practice is very important.

In Maharashtra at higher secondary (Junior college) colleges, English language teachers have taught the concept of grammar for many years. Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education has prescribed course book in English for standard 11th and 12th each. For 11th and 12th standard name of the prescribed textbook is ‘Yuvakbharati’. These course books include all grammar topics. After each grammar topic, experts have recommended exercises for practice. Given activities are very interesting and it is the teachers' job to conduct it effectively. To conduct these activities teacher should be competent enough to understand the importance and suitability of the activities. If a teacher thinks that, given activity is not suitable to his/her students there teacher should make necessary changes according to students' need.



e.g. activity regarding 'Direct and Indirect Speech'. In this activity, initially rules of the topic are well explained. In the activity, students are asked to work in pair and to convert given passage in Indirect Speech.

Here, activity is interesting. It is conducted in pair so, students' confidence can be boosted but while conducting such kind of activities selection of a passage is very important. To give more practice language teacher has to select or prepare more passages and in this case, the teacher has to consider students' needs and accordingly need to select a paragraph. Therefore, here the teacher's competency is important. Through these kinds of activities, students can get more practice to use the present topic to improve writing skills.

Nowadays there are different methods to teach grammar. Different grammar activities are available through which language teacher can explain grammar effectively. Through different grammar classroom activities, the teacher can create interest among students. All activities are not suitable but here the teacher has to use his or her competency. Selection of grammar activities depends on who is doing the teaching, what kind of students occupy the classroom, the demands of the higher secondary education system, As per students' needs activities should be selected. It has been observed that the traditional method of teaching grammar is still very popular among experienced as well as the teachers who have entered in this field newly. Compare to less teaching experienced teachers use the example set by their teachers in high school. They follow traditional examples, grammar book, and worksheet; fill in the blanks, and right or wrong examples. Here teachers teach grammar in an isolated way. Teachers do not try to connect it with other subjects and when grammar is taught the traditional and isolated way, have to be retaught the same grammatical concepts year after year. In this process, students simply do not learn it. They remember the grammar concepts for the exam, worksheet and test but soon after they forget the rules and have to learn it in the next year. Every year they are taught to learn rules. Most of the students learn grammar rules without understanding their application. They are not able to apply rules in practical situations and students lose interest in language learning. Base on this information many teachers have decided to abandon the practice of grammar altogether. They have brushed off basic rules and wait in hopes that if students will read enough and write enough, they will start to naturally see the patterns of the English language, and for most of the students it works but it requires students'



interest in language learning. Therefore, the present paper is focused on the need for teachers' competency in designing classroom activities by considering the requirement of higher secondary students in Maharashtra.

Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT):

The term CBLT stands for competency-based language teaching. Competency-based language teaching (CBLT) is an application of the principles of CBE to a language setting (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

There are many grammar teaching activities are available and different activities are focused on different language skills but the selection of activities and innovate new activities as per students' requirement is the responsibility of a language teacher. Here the teacher needs to use his or her creativity and competency. In the process of English language, grammar teaching the role of the teacher changes from one of being information- giver to that of a facilitator (Organization of American States,2006; Sturgis &Patrick,2010). It doesn't mean teachers any longer give information, but that they give different types of information and deliver it in different ways. Teachers provide the materials, the activities, and the practise opportunities to their students (Paul, 2008). The quality and authenticity of these materials play a vital role in the success of the class. It is the part of teachers' competency to check the authenticity and quality of the selected material. Language teacher can also use his or her competency to improve students' speaking skills.

For Example: In the above-mentioned activity for 'Direct and Indirect Speech', by making some changes teacher can use the same activity to improve students' speaking skill. A language teacher can make the following changes,

In the first session, the teacher can ask students to convert selected passage into indirect speech and in the next session, students can be asked to present same passage or dialogue in front of teacher and classmates. So, students will get the opportunity to present their work and they could practice speaking skill as well.

Here, the language teacher needs to show his or her creativity. The entire time teacher needs not to create a new activity but as per students' requirement teacher can make changes in existing activities by using his or her competency.



In the process of competency-based language teaching teachers' planning becomes a central part. First, students' competency in the English language must be identified. As per students' language learning problems, different modules must be developed. These modules must allow students the opportunity to learn and practice language skills. Specific rubrics must be developed and accordingly, students should be assessed from the beginning of the lesson. In this process, English language teachers have to devote a large amount of time for creating interesting activities related to specific skills to fulfil the competency requirements. Teachers will have to devote large amounts of time creating activities related to specific skills necessary to fulfil the competency requirements. Significant time will also be required to assess students and provide specific, directed, and personalized feedback (Richard & Rogers, 2001).

Task-Based Language Teaching:

"A task is a goal-oriented activity that people undertake and that involves meaningful use of language" The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching by Kris van den Branden. Nunan (1989:10) states that task is "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form". Task-based language teaching has been implemented for many years. Countries like New Zealand and Vietnam, TBLT has been disseminated by the national government as the most popular second language teaching approach. TBLT developed out of applied linguists and pedagogues. In India Prabhu (1987) has seriously explored this idea and organized a language learning curriculum based on a task-based approach.

This project is known as 'the Bangalore Project'. Through the TBLT approach, various traditional approaches can be used. The task-based approach aims at presenting opportunities for learners to master language both in speaking and writing via learning activities designed to engage learners in the natural, practical and functional use of language for the meaningful purpose (Lin, 2009). Ellis (2003) States that recently TBLT approach has been re-investigated from a variety of perspectives covering oral performance, writing performance, and performance assessment. Here are some benefits of TBLT by Ellis (2009)



TBLT provides the opportunity for 'natural' learning within the classroom context.

- It stresses meaning over form; however, it can also emphasize learning form.
- It offers learners a fertile input of target language.
- It is intrinsically motivating.
- It is consistent with a learner-focused educational philosophy but also gives permission for teacher input and guidance.
- It contributes to the improvement of communicative fluency while not disregarding accuracy.
- It can be deployed together with a more traditional approach.

These are the few benefits of task-based language teaching. In this approach, the teacher plays a very important role because without language teacher's active participation this approach can't be implemented effectively.

Importance of Classroom Activities for Teaching Grammar:

Teaching grammar through classroom activities is one of the effective ways to motivate students for learning language skills. Classroom activities make students interactive. Using activities and games in class encourages active learning, as well as collaboration, and interactivity (Reburn,1999). In group classroom activities students interact with other group members which are useful to improve communication skill. Some classroom activities are interesting because they provide pleasurable tension to participants and sometimes spectator.

For e.g. If a class is shown a video and invited to make up sentences about it using the present progressive, there is no challenge involved. If, however, we rephrase the objective: Makeup 20 sentences about a video using the present progressive tense, there is an immediate rise in tension (Can we get to 20 or can't we?), and interest increases, we can increase it still further by introducing a time limit (Makeup 20 sentences about the video using present progressive within two minutes) (Ur,Penny,1988). By using this type of activities several times in the class students will motivate to participate. And the amount of language produced. These types of activities are useful to boost students' confidence level which is very important to learn language skills.



Problems of Teaching and Learning English Language Grammar at Higher Secondary Level:

1. **Lack of Clear Aim and Objective:** There is a general lack of clarity about the aims and objectives of teaching of English in India. At the Higher, Secondary level teachers know they have to teach grammar since it is included in the syllabus.
2. **Over-Crowded Classes:** Over-Crowded classes are the biggest problem in the education system. Sixty to Seventy students are regarded as the normal class size but in certain cases, the class size is 80 to 100 students. Teachers of English experience a lot of problems in handling such a big class. It is difficult to pay attention to the individual. It is difficult to conduct activities as well.
3. **Students' Attitude towards Language Learning:** At Higher Secondary level students learn the English language because it is prescribed in their syllabus and this subject is compulsory to learn.
4. **Less Competent Teachers to Teach Grammar:** Grammar is the heart of every language. Grammar is learned to use four skills of language competently. Grammar learning means not to learn grammar rules thoroughly. Teaching and learning functionally is the right method for both, where students actively participate to speak. Several structures and phrases can be taught by the inductive method but incompetent teachers make it deductive and passive. Students only learn rules and they try to use those rules in prescribed exercise.
5. **Lack of Motivation:** It has been observed that at higher secondary level students are less motivated to learn grammar. One of the reasons could be they give more importance to their stream related subjects. They look at the English subject at the exam point of view. Importance of grammar and language skills is not taught that's why they learn grammar part only to improve their score. Grammar topics are taught only to make students able to solve given exercises which are necessary to pass the exam and students be promoted to the next class.
6. **Lack of Audio-Visual Aids:** No Junior College could be found proper Audio-Visual aids to make the language class actively. Using audio-visual aids could make the class not only lively but also encourage the students to participate in language tasks.



Few Suggestions to Overcome the Problems:

1. Teachers of English language first clear the aims and objectives of teaching grammar and always emphasize on the aims.
2. Special efforts should be made to ensure that teachers get proper teaching facilities including books and teaching aids.
3. Teachers should use creative activities to teach grammar topics instead of using traditional methods.
4. Different workshops, training programmes, lectures regarding classroom language teaching activities must be organized and should be attended by higher secondary language teachers.
5. Separate practical hours for English language learning should be allotted like other practical based subjects. So students can practice learnt grammar topics and teachers can conduct different interesting language learning activities and can pay attention to the individual.

Conclusion:

Thus, Present paper gives emphasize on the importance of classroom activities to teach different difficult grammar topics. Now teachers need to step out of their comfort zones and adopt new roles. Classroom activities make students active learners. All classroom activities are not effective and all language problems can't be solved by classroom activities but it is teachers' responsibility to select and create appropriate classroom activities to teach different grammar topics.

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