



AUTHENTIC MATERIALS PROMOTE BETTER LEARNING IN ESL CLASSROOM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The learning of a second language and its acquisition is indeed a herculean task. It becomes further difficult while handling the first generation of second language learners. The world is a global village and English is the lingua franca of this village. In today's world Globalization is the primary challenge faced by the people of the third world countries like India. With the advent of Globalization the need of the hour is communication in a common tongue which is accepted worldwide. Therefore learning of English as a second/foreign language is of utmost importance. This paper aims to highlight the different aspects of second language learning in the perspective of a model Indian classroom. The paper is based on the study which is experimental in nature and is executed through Pre test, Post test and a series of classroom activities. The experiment was conducted with the high school students in a regional medium school in West Bengal where majority of the students are first generation literate. It is observed that language learning is better facilitated by the use of authentic materials as the learners here get an opportunity to communicate in the target language rather than focusing only on the grammar rules. The authors have attempted to highlight their own experiences to analyze the different aspects of second language teaching-learning in standard Indian classrooms.

Keywords: ESL, authentic materials, Indian classrooms, learner autonomy

INTRODUCTION

Communication is of utmost importance in these days. Communication is a process through which we are able to express or share our views or knowledge. In the era of globalization English language gives us an opportunity to get united with the whole world. The English

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language has its roots from the British rule. When India was a colony of British then English was treated as a foreign language but later on after independence English gradually earned the status of a second language. India is celebrating seventy years of Independence and English now holds its position as the most essential and powerful language of the country. English is considered as the associate official link language in our country and is used beside Hindi in all central administrative purpose. This paper is based on the study conducted in West Bengal where people from different parts of India reside for various reasons like for pursuing higher studies or for jobs. The mother tongue of the natives is Bengali and thus this language is used widely. English is generally treated as a second language in the vernacular medium (Bengali/Hindi) schools. During the 70s and 80s English was eliminated from the primary course (class I-IV) and students used to learn English as a second language in the middle school from Class V or VI. However there were lot of debates and discussions in the government level and among the intellectuals and the situation during the last ten years have changed and presently English is being taught right from standard I in most schools.

However, there is an unimaginable difference between English as a subject taught in the schools and the functional use of English in everyday life. In the conventional curriculum, there is hardly any scope to go beyond the prescribed texts. The school curriculum puts more stress in literary text and grammar with very little emphasis on practical utility of English, which calls for attention in everyday life. Moreover in schools of vernacular medium, instruction for most subjects is given in regional language and therefore the students fail to acquire the communication competence in English language since their childhood. Moreover the mechanical drills as per the textbooks make the atmosphere of the ELL (English Language Learning) classroom monotonous and fail to attract the young learners. The use of authentic materials might be beneficial in this context for enhancing the teaching-learning in the language classrooms.

Objective

Materials are tools that provide support to the teacher and the learner and enable the teaching and learning in a systematic way. An effective learning of a lesson depends considerably upon the quality of the material used. A well structured material may help in motivating the learner; on the other hand a weakly woven material might also discourage the learners. Authentic materials are mostly produced from real life situations which are inexpensive and easily available. These materials help to generate interest in the learners and help them to develop their inner creativity. This paper aims to investigate the different aspects of Second language learning in the context of standard ESL classroom in India. An experimental study is conducted with the high school students in a regional medium school in West Bengal by the use of authentic materials in the language classroom. The prime objective of this study is

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to show that authentic materials are much more effective in getting a desired outcome of language learning in the classroom. This study will no doubt be helpful to give the High school English Language Teachers multiple ideas to design suitable tasks by using authentic materials in their respective classrooms.

Methods and Procedure

This experimental study was conducted in a High school in the semi urban area of West Bengal. The students of standard XI of Dumdum Shree Arabinda Vidyamandir was chosen as the target group. The class comprised of thirty students coming from an economically challenged background where most of them were first generation literate. The investigators proposed the school authority to give them a slot for six weeks (thrice in a week for two hours) where the students would be exposed to the basics of Communicative English. The idea was to make them converse in English in real life situations and promote learner autonomy. The experimental devices used for this study was authentic materials comprising of Songs, newspaper and TV programmes. In the present research two types of Variables were used. The independent variable in this study was the authentic materials and the dependent variables are the analysis of pre test and post test scores.

Pre Test

A pre test was conducted with all the thirty students of Class XI who were selected for the experimentation. The test was conducted in their scheduled classes.

Date of assessment: 24th August, 2017

Duration of the activity -1hr.

Full marks-30

Listening activity: Total marks-5

A recording of a popular TV show was played and the students were asked to note down any five adjectives used in the conversation.

Reading activity: Total marks -5

They were asked to open their textbook and read a specific lesson and were instructed to find five pairs of synonymous words from it.

Speaking activity: Total marks-10(Presentation of the topic-6, Grammar-4)

The students were asked to tell about their favourite pastime.

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Writing activity: Total marks-10(Writing of the topic-6, Grammar-4)

This was followed by a writing test where they had to write a letter to the class teacher requesting him/her to take them to an outing during the winter vacation.

While evaluating the researchers made the following observations:

- Most of the students were at a loss while the conversation was played and they were unable to follow the English although it was in Indian accent.
- The students were having a difficult time finding out synonymous pairs even though the passage was given from their textbook.
- It was noted that most of the students hesitated to speak at first and when they spoke finally nervousness was clearly observed from their negative body language
- students were not having a creative bent of mind which can make a formal letter sound appealing
- tremendous spelling mistakes and error in grammar forms
- format of the letter is incorrect in most cases

It was found that most of the students scored below 10. The scores of the entire set of students were recorded

Lesson for first and second week: practice of listening skills

The researchers in the first week wanted the learners to enjoy the class through the flavour of music. Song is a meaningful collection of words with a piece of music. It also provides a deep insight into the socio-cultural background of a community and helps in vocabulary building, grammar, pronunciation, intonation etc.. With beautiful melody and catchy lyrics, introducing English songs to ESL classroom not only make the students de-stressed, but also provide ample resources to the students. The songs with beautiful melodies which have bilingual versions were chosen. The examples of such songs are:



If you miss the train...hundred miles(Hindi version:Jab koi baat bigar jaye....),Down the way when the nights are gay...(Bengali version:Kon se dur...sei swapnopur..)

These were slow paced songs which enabled the students to understand the lyrics. The transcript of the song was displayed in front of the students. They were made to listen to the song twice and were motivated by the teacher to sing it with the proper lyrics

Lesson for third and fourth week: practice of other speaking and presenting skill

The students were made to watch and listen to some TV interviews of celebrities and on the basis of that they were given some reflective questions which required language understanding skills. The students were asked to note the phrases and specific words which were used by the speakers to introduce themselves. They were also instructed to observe the body language of the speakers and on the basis of that each student was asked to give a self introduction. Moreover paragraph writing and discussions were also initiated based on these activities.

Lesson for fifth and sixth week: practice of reading and writing skills

The students were asked to seat in pairs and the researchers distributed a handout which contained an excerpt from a newspaper report. The learners were asked to go through the excerpts and the teacher explained the concept of reading for comprehending a passage for general understanding. A focus was given on the grammar and functional language or a lexical text. The activities were based on searching factual details like word phrases, identification of tenses, change of verb forms etc...The students on the sixth week were asked to write summary of the passages on their own words.

Post Test

At the end of the six weeks there was a gap of one week and after that two Post tests were scheduled. The Post tests were based on LSRW skills and had three sections each carrying 10 marks: one focused on Grammar, Vocabulary and general understanding while the other was on 'Listening for Specific Purpose' followed by Speaking and Writing.

Post Test-1

Time-30 minutes

Marks-30

Material used: Radio Programme

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An audio clipping on a conversation was played. The students were at first explained the concept of the activity and then the worksheets were distributed. There were three sections containing ten questions each from the area of Grammar, synonyms-antonyms and short questions based on general understanding of the conversation. The basic objective of this activity was to assess the language sub skills and vocabulary of the candidates.

Post Test-2

Time-30 minutes

Marks-30

Material used: Video resume

A video resume of a candidate was played. The students were at first explained the concept of video resume and the context was set for the activity. There were twenty questions which were based on the concept of 'Listening for specific purpose', Speaking and Writing. The students were distributed a worksheet which consisted three sections. The first section had questions which assessed their listening abilities based on the video resume, some of which are given below:

- Candidate's name
- Education
- Pastime
- Aim

The second section was based on Speaking where the learners were asked to introduce themselves following the above pattern of the video resume. In the third section the students were asked to write about their ambition in life within 200 words.

The worksheets were collected and checked by the researchers and the marks were recorded. In both the post tests the performance of most of the students was better than the Pre test. This was kept for data analysis and interpretation.

Results and discussion

The research devices paved the path for assemblage of innumerable ideas and opinions and on the basis of the test scores the evaluation and analysis were made. The students showed improvements in all the tested areas of LSRW skills, Grammar, Vocabulary and General



understanding. Therefore it is understood that the six-weeks training programme using authentic materials proved to be useful to the students.

It can be seen from the scores of the Post tests that in all the five areas such as- Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, grammar, vocabulary, the scores of the Post Test surpassed the Pre Test scores. The comparison chart is given below:

Means of the scores

Area	Pre Test	Post Test
Listening	2.33	3.53
Speaking	2.24	4.23
Reading	3.2	4.06
Writing	2.5	3.66
Grammar	2.88	3.12

The analysis made above is very important for the present study which basically aimed to find out the effectiveness of using authentic materials in promoting better language learning in the classrooms. The lessons were designed in such a way to cover the different areas of language skills-LSRW and also threw light on the sub skills such as Grammar and Vocabulary.

Conclusion and Implications of the study

The present study mainly dealt with the application of authentic materials which can lead to the enhancement of language learning skills in the learners. The execution of this experimental study was applied on the students of standard XI at Dumdum Shree Arabinda Vidyamandir located in Dumdum, West Bengal. From the results of this experimental study the following findings are listed below:

- The students of regional medium are hesitant in English communication
- From the results of this experimental study it clearly revealed that use of authentic materials proved to be more effective than the conventional materials like textbooks in teaching communicative English.
- As language learning is a cognitive process so the appropriate 'state of mind' is very essential for the learner to receive the inputs correctly. In this context the beautiful



melodies of a song makes the brain active and provides pleasure to the students. This pleasant feeling indeed leads to better learning.

- The authentic materials enhanced the students' concentration, eagerness to grasp the meaning and also energized them to participate in the activities whole-heartedly. This indeed fostered learner autonomy within the language classrooms.
- The analysis of the non-verbal behaviour of the participating learners has manifested the quantitative analysis of the Post test scores.

The authors conclude with a hope to make use of this study in the field of development of language skills in the social and professional sphere. Authentic materials provide immense resources for ELT teachers and give them the opportunity to expose the learners in real life. There are various sources for compiling authentic materials which are easily available all around us. A few have been mentioned in the present paper, besides these the other materials can be advertisements, Journals, Magazines, Scaffolds etc..

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