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An Exploratory Study of Teaching Summary Writing Using Short Stories to Regional Medium Secondary Level Learners in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Writing skill is a complex skill of all the four skills. It is extremely difficult for regional medium school level learners. In spite of good syllabus and learning material, the students are deplorably deficient in English in general and writing skill in particular and are not interested in reading the textbooks. Language in the textbook may be difficult for them. Moreover teachers do not follow any approaches to teach writing and they just narrate the story and give notes. They are also not using any strategies to create interest among learners to read the text. That is why they become reluctant, not interested and develop fear towards the textbook. Hence there is no willingness on the part of the learner. The study in this paper begins with an assumption that the major issue with the teaching of writing is the lack of willingness on the part of the learner to write. Therefore, this study aims at improving the writing skill of learners in vernacular medium schools through some strategic teaching procedure. The strategy will be in the form of using short stories as tools to stimulate the creative and imaginative faculties of the learners by activating their language use. Such a study is justified in the sense that innovative pedagogical practice for teaching writing will increase the interest and motivation level of the learners and maximize the rate of learning which will ultimately lead them to self directed language. These stories will be treated from simple to complex and will be sourced from Chandamama, BaLamitra and similar others. These stories have well developed story link with a beginning, middle and an end. Languages in these stories are simple and easy to understand. It is assumed that these features make short stories best suited to the high school level students of the regional medium schools in the rural areas. Among the several forms of writing carried out in the schools, this research focuses specifically in writing a summary. The paper discusses how English language is a global language, the importance and status of English in India and followed by the status of English in Andhra Pradesh. It also presents background to the study, hypothesis, and research problem, research questions and scope of the study. It attempts to present a suitable theoretical framework for the study. It also discusses the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching English and how short stories are useful in teaching language skills. Further, it gives a detailed picture of writing in specific, then an overview of language skills, its characteristics and different approaches.

Introduction: The status of English in the Global Context

Today, it is acknowledged that English exists in all spheres of life. It has attained the status of a global language than any other language in the history of the World. The representation of the English language in all parts of the world including the terrestrial continents and all major oceans alike, makes it a self-evident fact that we call English a World Language (Crystal, 2003). English owes its frequent determination as a lingua franc to this very fact. So, according to Crystal (1997:9). " English is a Global lingua Franca" A " Lingua Franca" or common language is the language that used in a situation where people with different nationalities communicate, and when they have no other language in common-crystal calls this " Global Status" {Crystal. 1997:2) of a language. Crystal also states that: "A Language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country" (Crystal, 1997:2).

This special role can be either the status of an official language in a country, like e.g. in India and the language priority in country's foreign language teaching, as in over 100 countries, such go China, Russia, and Germany etc. Because of this three-pronged development of first language, official language and foreign language speakers-it is inevitable that a global language will eventually come to be used more people than any other language. English has already reached this stage (Crystal, 1997:4). He further says" The global status of a language depends on the power of its speakers (1997:5)".

The importance and status of English in India

Since English language is important to achieve the various language needs, it is important to look at the status of English in India. As far as English language is concerned, it begins with a quick review of important decisions taken by the Indian Government in order to improve the teaching or learning conditions of second language. With the British leaving India in 1947, the problem of English education attained a new dimension. Language policy was one of the immediate

concerns of the Government of India. An integrated language policy became all the more necessary for a variety of reasons-educational, cultural and political. The specific problem was the change of medium to the vernacular and yet retain English for a variety of needs-as a library language, as a link language as a medium for higher levels of education and as the official language.

It was recommended that English should be continued as associate official language and also as a medium of instruction at higher levels of education. An important outcome was the *Three-Language Formula*, which came to be adopted at the school level of education primarily in English. The importance of English language in the educational field is clear from the fact that English has a definite place in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities in India. The future of English as a language. The day is not far when this language will become the single language have a single currency.

Status of English in Andhra Pradesh

English is the official language of nearly 50 different countries and is currently spoken as a first language by over 300 million people. Among the numerous dialects of English spoken throughout the world, two, usually referred to as (standard) American English and (standard) British English, have a rather special status in that they are considered distinct standards for the teaching of English as a foreign language. That is the variety of English spoken by the educated speakers in southern England.

In Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) one of the southern states of India, English is mostly used for educational and administrative purposes. Most of the state wide correspondence is done in English. In Telugu medium schools, it is introduced in 4th standard at high school level in non-English medium schools, English is the third language while Hindi is the second and Telugu is the first language. At intermediate and graduate level, it is one of the two languages in part-I

(languages). English is the medium of instruction in most of the colleges at post-graduation level. English is the language of higher education.

Recently phonetics of English has been introduced at graduation level to enable the students to acquire good listening and speaking skills of English. Many English medium schools and spoken English institutes have been established.

Background of the study

Writing is not only an important skill but also a complex skill of all the four skills. In Andhra Pradesh, it has been observed that many learners have a problem in L2 writing especially at secondary level in regional medium schools. Thus it is extremely difficult for regional medium school level learners to achieve required writing proficiency. The lack of proficiency can be attributed to several factors such as inadequate writing practice in the classroom, poor vocabulary, examination oriented writing, and teacher dictated writing, lack of exposure to English, lack of a homogeneous English speaking continuity, limited reading habits and so on.

In spite of good syllabus and learning material the students are deplorably deficient in English in general and writing skill in particular. It is not surprising to see English lessons are being taught in Telugu. They are not interested to read the textbooks.

Language in the textbook may be difficult for them. Moreover teachers do not follow any approaches to teach writing. In addition to this learning English is taught as a content subject and does not focus on real knowledge of the language. And they are not using any strategies to create interest among learners to read the text. Hence they become reluctant, not interested and developed fear towards the textbook. So there is no willingness on the part of the learner.

Despite of learning English as part of their curriculum for three years and being unable to compose a paragraph independently and coherently calls for immediate attention. Further, it is noticed that a large percentage of failures from regional medium schools in class X public examination occurs

especially due to poor performance in English. This poor proficiency in English is not only affecting the performance and grades of these learners in class X public examination, but also affects their career and full her education. After `onwards these learners are in confusion and under a dilemma about making planes for higher education as they lack proficiency in English. Sometimes they arc forced to opt for vocational courses like ITI, Polytechnic etc, which lowers the self- esteem and confidence levels of these learners. Therefore, there is an extreme need to help these learners to improve their writing skill in English language.

Hypothesis of the Study

This study hypothesize as the following

- There would be basic problems with summary writing
- Learners may have cohesion and coherence problems in L2 writing.
- LI tasks may be easier than L2 tasks.
- Teaching summary writing through stories would serve as a successful strategy to enhance the writing skill of ESL learners in rural areas.
- Gradual training in organizing ideas coherently will help learners to learn summary writing.

The Research problem of the paper

The need for the present research, " Teaching Summary Writing Using Short stories to Regional Medium Secondary Level Learners In Andhra Pradesh: An Experiment" emerges from the teaching experience of the author of the paper in which it was noticed that learners in Regional medium schools struggle to write in English. Among the several forms of writing carried out in the schools, this research focuses specifically in teaching summary writing, From class VIII to X these learners have to write summary writing task with the help of hints. Even though hints are providing, they are not able to write it by their own.

As per my knowledge it was observed that the only Kind of writing these learners are used to be copy notes from the black board or taking down teachers dictated notes with numerous errors. Moreover teachers do not follow any strategies to teach summary writing Instead of making learners to write the summary by their own with the help of given hints, the teachers are just explaining the lesson and giving direct summary for the given hints.

Thus learners are habituated to rote learning. Finally whoever mnemonics their notes, they are getting marks in their examinations and others not. This lowers the self-esteem and confidence levels of these learners. In the L2 writing class whatever is happening from the point of examinations only and not from the point of learners learning "My objective is to identify the learner`s difficulty in summary writing and help them to improve. If the learners learn summarizing at school level only, it is hoped that they will be able to differentiate various types of writings like descriptive, narrative, technical and academic writings. And this will help them in higher education. In order to help theses learners, I used short stories to teach summary writing and observe if it improved their performance level

Teaching English through Literature

The main objective of ESL teaching is to help students to communicate fluently in the target language cause most teachers still believe that an ESL class should focus on mastering linguistic elements only. However, recent trend in ESL teaching indicates the necessity of integrating literature because its rich potential to provide an authentic model of language use. In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction has been gaining momentum.

In the nineteenth century, the Grammar Translation Method predominated ESL/EFL teaching. In that era, translating literary texts from the second/foreign language to the students' native language

was one of the main learning activities. But when this method was replaced by the Structuralism Approach, during the 1960s to the end of 1970s, literature was no longer used. Structuralism Approach was concerned with correctness of grammatical form and not with content, interpretation of the written word or style. In other words, teaching a foreign language was regarded as a matter of linguistics. Then, when the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and the Natural Approach successively dominated ESL/EFL teaching, literature was not utilized. Later on and with the appearance of the Communicative Approach in the late 70's and very early 80's, literature was also ignored. The tendency in the ESL classrooms was to teach "usable, practical" contents. Thus, literary works had no place in the curriculum. During this period most ESL courses were mainly aimed to enable the students to communicate orally. Consequently, dialogues dominated the curriculum.

However, since the 1980s the situation changed quite radically and literature is undergoing an extensive reconsideration within the language teaching profession. As mentioned above, the inclusion of literary works in ESL/EFL classes has attracted more interest among teachers, and more and more studies on how to use literature in EFL/ESL classes are conducted. This interest in using literature in language teaching lies in three interrelated elements: authenticity, culture and personal growth. First of all, literary texts can be more beneficial than informational materials in stimulating the acquisition process as they provide authentic contexts for processing new language.

Since literary texts contain language intended for native speakers, literature stands as a model for language learners to become familiar with different forms and conventions (Collie and Slater, 1991, 4; Ur, 1996, 201).

Containing real examples of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, the literary texts raise learners' awareness of the range of the target language and advance their competence in all language skills (Povey, 1967). Second, using literature in language teaching has the advantage of providing cultural information about the target language.

Literary texts increase foreign language learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt (Collie and Slater, 1991), which fosters learners' ability to interpret discourse in different social and cultural target language contexts (Savvidou, 2004). Finally, since literature enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own, it encourages personal growth and intellectual development (Carter and Long, 1991, 2-4).

In line with these ideas, Littlewood (2000: 179) emphasizes the importance of the use of literature in EFL classes by showing the fact that a major problem of language teaching in the classroom is the creation of an authentic situation for language. All language classrooms, especially those outside the community of native speakers, are isolated from the context of events and situations which produce natural language. Literature can overcome this problem because, in literary works, language creates its own context. The actual situation of the reader becomes immaterial as he or she looks on the events created by language. These events create, in turn, a context of situation for the language of the book and enable it to transcend the artificial classroom situation. In short, literary works undoubtedly enable students to understand the language better by providing the students with real world experiences, relationships between society and people where the target Language is spoken, even if they are fictions.

Reasons for using literary texts in the second language classroom

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural

enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context.

Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials. Thus; in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life / real life like settings. Literature can act as a beneficial complement to such materials, particularly when the first "survival" level has been passed. In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, thus they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

Cultural Enrichment

For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal/nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken - a visit or an extended stay - is just not probable. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colourful setting in which characters from many social / regional backgrounds can be described. A reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside i.e. their thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave in different settings. This colourful created world can

quickly help the second language learner to feel for the codes and preoccupations that shape a real society through visual literacy of semiotics.

Literature is perhaps best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the second language learners understanding into the country whose language are being learned. Also, literature adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the! Camels.

Language Enrichment

Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts.

Personal Involvement

Literature can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax; he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. This can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, and interests, language level of the students is evident. In this process, he can

remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert,

Literature and the Teaching of Language Skills

Literature plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences.

Next the role of literature in writing is discussed since the study focuses on teaching writing.

Literature and Writing

Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL I EFL, both as a model and as subject matter. Literature as a model occurs when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and /or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. Literature houses in immense variety of themes to write on in terms of guided, free, controlled and other types of writing

Literature as a Model for Writing

There are three main kinds of writing that can be based on literature as a model:

1) Controlled Writing

Controlled model-based exercises which are used mostly in beginning-level writing typically require rewriting passages in arbitrary ways to practise specific grammatical structures. For instance, students can be reporters doing a live newscast, or they can rewrite a third person

passage into first person from a characters point of view.

2) *Guided Writing*

This activity corresponds to ESL students. Students respond to a series of questions or complete sentences which, when put together, retell or sum up the model. In some cases, students complete the exercise after they receive the first few sentences or the topic sentence of a summary, paraphrase, or description. Guided writing exercises, especially at the literal level, enable students to comprehend the work. Model approach and scenario approach are very beneficial in this respect.

3) *Reproducing the Model*

This activity comprises techniques like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation. These techniques are very beneficial ESL / EFL writing exercises. In paraphrasing, students are required to use their own words to rephrase the things that they see in print or hear aloud. Since paraphrase coincides with the students' trying to make sense of the poem, it is a strikingly useful tool with poetry. Summary work goes well with realistic short stories and plays, where events normally follow a chronological order and have concrete elements like plot, setting, and character to guide student writing. Adaptation requires rewriting prose fiction into dialog or, reversely, rewriting a play or a scene into narrative. This activity enables students to be aware of the variations between written and spoken English (Stern 1991:333).

Among literary genres (poems, drama, short stories, novel etc.). Short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for this due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories. Thus the study focused on short stories to teach writing skill.

Definition of short story

A short story is a kind of "fictional narrative", as said in the online source "Narrative writing-Writing a story", being written to amuse other people. The writers' main aim should be to elicit the reader's eagerness to read.

As any other genre, short story has its specific features. According to Cathy Kennedy and Dennis G. Jerz ("Short Stories: 10 Tips for Novice Creative Writers": I), a short story:

- Gets off to a fast start.
- Generally have a limited number of characters and scenes.
- Starts as close to the conclusion as possible.
- Frequently deals only with one problem.
- Uses only the detail necessary for understanding the situation.
- Usually covers just a short time period.

I think that Wright (1997) provides us with a very clear and straightforward definition of short stories and he says that: "they have a beginning. A problem, an emotion, an action, and an end" (Wright 1997: 5).

Benefits of using short stories

Thus Stories are very important for children in learning their mother tongue, and they are important in learning any foreign language as well, That is why it is good to start using stories in teaching English as soon as possible. Ellis and Brewster (2002:2) said, "Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being overtly reinforced.

Many stories contain natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures. This helps children to remember every detail, so they can gradually learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story. Repetition also encourages participation in the Stories are very motivating, challenging and great fun for children. "they can help develop positive attitudes

towards the foreign language, culture and language learning (Ellis and Brewster, 2002:1) Using stories allows the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary and sentence structures by exposing the children to language in varied, memorable and familiar contexts, which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their own speech. Listening to stories helps children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language (Ellis and Brewster, 2002:2) Stories also provide opportunities for developing continuity in children learning. They can link English with other subject areas across the curriculum When children listen to stories in class they share social experience, it provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation which is not only enjoyable but 'can help to build up the child's confidence and encourage social and emotional development. Stories are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child's real world They provide a way of enabling children to make sense of their everyday life and forge links between home and school.

Children exercise their imagination through stories. They can become personally involved in a story as they identify with the characters and try to interpret the narrative and illustrations. This imaginative experience helps students develop their own creative potential.

Stories also develop the different types of 'intelligences' that contribute to language learning, including emotional intelligence. Stories develop children learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing (Ellis and Brewster, 2002:2). Stories can develop all children's skills.

Conclusion

In this chapter, an attempt was made to introduce the research design of the study. The research questions and procedure adopted for the study, Environment of the school and syllabus also presented The samples of the study are discussed with learners and teachers profile, their attitudes to teaching and learning of English. Then the research procedure adopted for the study also discussed. The paper dealt with the interpretation of the obtained data. It also analyzed the

students` questionnaires, classroom observations and informal interviews of teachers and learners along with the teaching/learning tasks and conditions, other aspects of the study.

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