



Enabling English Language Acquisition

Tales from Thrissur

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Enabling English Language Acquisition: Tales from Thrissur

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The publication contains articles by teachers on innovative teaching methods adopted by them. These articles were initiated in a Teachers' Writing Workshop facilitated by Gurumurthy K, Jobin M Kanjirakkat and Marzia Ibrahim of IT for Change.

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Innovative Pathways: Classroom Practices in English Language Teaching from Thrissur

In an era where language proficiency is pivotal for global connectivity and personal development, innovative and effective English language teaching strategies are more crucial than ever. This joint publication by the District Centre for English, Thrissur, and IT for Change, Bangalore, embraces a collection of articles penned by a group of dedicated English language teachers from Thrissur District, Kerala. It showcases a remarkable array of innovative and creative pedagogical approaches designed to enhance English language proficiency among primary and secondary school students and offers a treasure trove of strategies that can inspire and guide teachers everywhere.

The twelve articles included here collectively emphasize the importance of creative and dynamic approaches to English language teaching. These teachers have ventured beyond traditional methods, embracing novel strategies to engage their students and enhance their language skills. Their work is a powerful testament to the transformative potential of innovative pedagogies in the classroom.

A prominent theme across several articles is the use of interactive and participatory methods to foster language acquisition. Anila R's study on integrating dance, acting, and games into English lessons highlights the benefits of Total Physical Response (TPR) activities in reducing student anxiety and increasing engagement. By transforming rote learning into dynamic, physical experiences, this approach makes language learning enjoyable and effective. Similarly, Elizabeth Poulouse's exploration of theatrical pedagogy demonstrates how drama can enhance communication, confidence, and critical thinking skills among students. This method not only makes learning more interactive but also promotes inclusivity and teamwork, which are crucial for a holistic education. Shibu E P's E-LIFE programme also demonstrates how engaging and interactive activities can cultivate English fluency in primary students. By using methods such as storytelling, language games, and picture descriptions, this programme effectively boosts students' confidence and language skills.

Visual aids and creative stimuli are also well-represented in this collection. Kulirma Beevi's exploration of picture descriptions to improve writing skills demonstrates how drawing and descriptive exercises can make language learning more concrete and enjoyable for young learners. This method effectively boosts students' engagement and interest in writing. Bindu K's innovative use of emojis as a language learning tool further illustrates how visual stimuli can enhance vocabulary and sentence

construction. This creative approach stimulates the universal appeal of emojis to make learning more relatable and fun, thereby improving language proficiency.

Reading as a foundational skill is eloquently presented in Remya Gopal's article on the transformative power of reading. By organizing book review competitions, creating reading corners, and leveraging technology, she emphasizes the importance of cultivating a reading habit to enhance literacy skills. This initiative successfully fosters a culture of reading, benefiting both students and educators by making reading a collaborative and enjoyable journey.

The importance of cultural relevance and local context is emphasized in Arathy K R's paper on developing local texts to supplement centralized textbooks. This approach addresses the need for culturally resonant materials that enhance student motivation and comprehension. By developing simple, engaging booklets tailored to learning outcomes, this strategy promotes self-directed learning and a deeper connection to the local culture, thereby improving comprehension and retention.

Collaborative and peer learning strategies are showcased in Sajitha Joseph's Percipience Procedure and the use of word games by Meenu Krishnan. These articles highlight how group activities and games can enhance language skills and critical thinking. The Percipience Procedure promotes active engagement and critical thinking, moving away from traditional passive learning and memorization. Similarly, word games foster vocabulary and communication skills while making language learning enjoyable and engaging.

The challenges of English language learning in diverse and resource-constrained environments are addressed in Sandhya P U's research on mediation strategies and Meenu Vincent's focus on improving oral proficiency in rural areas. These articles underscore the need for tailored approaches that cater to varied student needs. By implementing mediation activities and creating immersive English-speaking environments, these strategies significantly enhance language proficiency and student engagement.

Lastly, the playful and engaging aspects of language learning are celebrated in Aswathi Mohanan's use of puppetry. This article demonstrates that learning can be both fun and effective, fostering a love for the language while building essential skills. Puppetry, as an educational tool, creates a dynamic, immersive, and interactive learning experience, making language acquisition an enjoyable journey for young learners.

This collection of articles is a testament to the dedication and ingenuity of English language teachers of Thrissur. It offers a wealth of innovative strategies, practical insights, and inspiring success stories. These contributions will undoubtedly serve as a guiding light for teachers aiming to make a significant impact in their classrooms. By embracing and expanding these creative approaches, we can continue to nurture

and develop the English language skills of our students, preparing them for a future of limitless possibilities.

Congratulations to all the teachers who have contributed to this publication. Your efforts are not just improving language education in your classrooms but are also inspiring a broader educational community. This collection stands as a beacon of creativity and commitment, highlighting the importance of continuous innovation and collaboration in education. May it serve as a guiding light for teachers seeking to make a meaningful impact on their professional development as well as their students' language learning journeys.



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Enhancing English Language Proficiency in Primary School Children through Integrating Dance, Acting, and Games

Anila R
GUPS Parlikad

Abstract

This paper presents an innovative pedagogical strategy aimed at enhancing English language proficiency among primary school learners by incorporating dance, acting, and games into language instruction. Drawing from personal experiences and insights gained from her practice, the author explores the transformative impact of Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, including dance, games, and acting, on student engagement and language acquisition. Through gradual immersion, learners overcome their inhibitions, leading to greater engagement, deeper comprehension, improved retention, heightened confidence, and a genuine enthusiasm for language learning. This holistic integration of creative methodologies caters to diverse learning styles, providing a dynamic and inclusive approach to English language acquisition.

Introduction

English is in high demand in Kerala, leading to a significant number of parents choosing to enroll their children in English medium schools, believing that fluency in English will provide them with better opportunities in the future. However, despite this emphasis on English education, there exists a notable difference between the parents' desire for proficiency and the actual attainment of language skills among students. One of the primary factors contributing to this gap is the conventional approach to English language teaching prevalent in many schools. Though there are abundant opportunities offered by our textbooks for the implementation of creative strategies and techniques in English classrooms, the conventional methods emphasize rote learning of grammar rules and vocabulary, with a strong focus on written exercises and examinations. This approach, while useful for understanding the technical aspects of the language, tends to neglect the development of practical communication skills. Moreover, the fear of making mistakes, particularly in terms of grammar and pronunciation, inhibits students from actively participating in English-speaking activities. They feel self-conscious and anxious about being judged by their peers and teachers, which hampers their confidence and willingness to use English in real-life situations. Usually, the learners approach English more as a subject to study rather than a language to use. To address these challenges, a paradigm shift in English language teaching is an imperative.

Teachers need to adopt more communicative and student-centred approaches that prioritize the development of speaking and listening skills alongside traditional grammar instruction. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes is essential for building their confidence and fluency in English. Recognising this challenge, the researcher set out on a mission to cultivate a more dynamic classroom atmosphere. Drawing upon the knowledge acquired during the training at District Centre for English, Thrissur (DCE), and Regional Institute of English, South India, Bengaluru (RIESI), the researcher introduced a range of innovative strategies to encourage spontaneous interaction among students. Through the incorporation of Total Physical Response (TPR), dance, and acting into the classroom process, tapped into the innate desire of children to engage physically and express themselves freely.

Drawing from personal experiences and insights derived from training sessions, this paper explores the transformative impact of Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, including dance, games, and acting, on student engagement and language acquisition. Learners gradually overcome inhibitions, fostering greater engagement, deeper comprehension, enhanced retention, heightened confidence, and a genuine passion for language learning. This holistic integration of creative methodologies caters to diverse learning styles, providing a dynamic and inclusive approach to English language acquisition.

Need and Significance

The need for this paper arises from the evident gap between the desired English language proficiency and the actual attainment of these skills among primary school children, in the two government schools in Thrissur, Kerala, where the researcher conducted the study. Despite the emphasis on English education, conventional teaching methods often fail to effectively engage students and develop their practical communication abilities. Rote learning of grammar rules and vocabulary, coupled with fear of making mistakes, inhibits students' confidence in using English in real-life situations.

The paper proposes a dynamic and comprehensive approach to English Language Teaching, integrating dance, acting, and games into language instruction. It not only addresses the need for a paradigm shift in English language teaching but also offers practical solutions to enhance student engagement and proficiency. By fostering confidence, enjoyment, collaboration, and diverse learning styles, this innovative approach aims to empower primary school children in Kerala with the essential English language skills for future success.

Objectives

The paper "Enhancing English language proficiency in primary learners through Total Physical Response" aims to achieve several objectives. Firstly, in the paper, the focus is on how students' confidence in using English can be improved by implementing interactive and physical learning activities that make language acquisition less intimidating. Secondly, the creation of an enjoyable atmosphere for learning English is discussed, which is necessary for making lessons engaging and motivating for primary learners. Additionally, it is shown how the activities discussed here promote collaboration among students, encouraging them to work together in pairs or groups to enhance their communication skills. Furthermore, attempts to improve students' oral communication skills by providing ample opportunities for them to interact using Total Physical Response techniques are discussed. Moreover, the attempts to cater to diverse learning styles, including kinesthetic learners, are presented. Overall, the integration of Total Physical Response techniques into English language teaching to enhance students' understanding and retention of vocabulary and grammar are emphasized.

Theoretical Overview

In this work, several theoretical perspectives are made use of to understand and explain the effectiveness of the methods used. Those key ideas are drawn from Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Kinesthetic Learning Theory and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory.

Krashen (1986), in his Affective Filter Hypothesis, observes that motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are three variables that play a role in second language acquisition. In essence, when feelings or emotions such as anxiety, fear, or embarrassment are elevated, it becomes difficult for language acquisition to occur. The affective filter has commonly been described as an imaginary wall that rises in the mind and prevents input as well as output, thus blocking cognition. In opposition, when the affective filter is lowered, the feeling of safety is high, and language acquisition occurs. In fact, even recent research in neuroscience seems to support Krashen's theory that stress affects thinking and learning (Willis, 2010). Integrating activities like dance, acting and games into the language learning process can help lower the affective filter by creating a positive and enjoyable learning environment. When students are actively engaged and having fun, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and less likely to experience feelings of anxiety or self-doubt. Strategies like dance, acting and games thus offer a stress-free atmosphere to the children and lower the affective filter. The lower the filter, the more input is allowed to pass through.

Total Physical Response (TPR), a method advanced by James Asher and supported by Krashen, advocates for the use of physical movement to reinforce language learning. Activities such as TPR games, where students follow commands in English, or

dramatizations of stories and dialogues, allow students to physically embody language concepts. This kinaesthetic approach can enhance comprehension and retention, especially for young learners who may benefit from hands-on learning experiences.

Developed by Fleming and Mills (1992), the kinesthetic learning theory emphasizes the role of physical movement in enhancing learning and memory. The theory suggests that by involving the body in the learning process, we create stronger neural connections, leading to better understanding and retention. Dancing, games and acting provide opportunities for kinesthetic engagement, allowing learners to grasp language concepts through movement and embodiment. Kinesthetic learners are those who learn best through physical activities. For English language learning, this means that students can use their bodies to understand and internalize language concepts. By incorporating these elements, educators can engage kinesthetic learners more effectively, making the learning process more enjoyable and memorable.

Proposed by Howard Gardner (1999), the Multiple Intelligences theory recognizes that individuals possess various intelligences and learn best through different modalities. The strategies used in the intervention incorporates dance (kinesthetic), acting (verbal, interpersonal), and games (logical, visual), catering to a wider range of learning styles and ensuring inclusivity for all participants. According to this theory, individuals have different types of intelligences, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, and naturalistic. Integrating dance, acting, and games into English language learning aligns well with this theory, as it acknowledges and caters to the diverse intelligences of students. Students can engage with the language in ways that resonate with their strengths and preferences, leading to improved understanding and retention of English language concepts.

Strategies Used

Dance: Dance provides a kinesthetic and multisensory approach to language learning. By moving their bodies to the rhythm and flow of English words and phrases, students can develop a deeper understanding of pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns. Additionally, incorporating storytelling elements into dance routines can help students internalize vocabulary and grammar structures in a meaningful context.

Acting: Acting allows students to step into different roles and practice using English language in real-world scenarios. By performing skits, dialogues, or even monologues, students gain confidence in their speaking abilities and develop essential communication skills like fluency, clarity, and expressiveness. Furthermore, acting exercises help students improve their understanding of character

development, plot structure, and emotional expression, which can enhance their overall comprehension of English literature and media.

Games: Games make language learning fun and interactive, motivating students to actively participate and practice their English skills. Language games target specific vocabulary, grammar, speaking skills, and provide immediate feedback and reinforcement. Additionally, collaborative games encourage teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills, which are essential for effective language acquisition.

Methods

Sample: This study explored the effectiveness of using dance, acting, and games to improve English language learning among Class 5 students in GUPS Parlikkad, Thrissur.

Duration: 2 months (ongoing)

Process: Dance, acting and game activities were designed to target specific English language skills, such as listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. These activities were integrated into the regular English curriculum for Class 5. The planned activities were implemented in the classroom for two months, with regular sessions incorporated into the weekly schedule, student participation, engagement, and progress in English language skills were observed throughout the intervention, The effectiveness of the activities was continually assessed, and adjustments were made based on the observations.

Resources: ICT, Textbook, Flashcards, Chits

At GUPS Parlikad School, located in the Thrissur district of Kerala, students were from economically and socially deprived backgrounds. Children showed a clear lack of interest in learning English. This was the motivation for exploring how emotional, physical, and cognitive exercises could be utilized for language teaching and learning. Consequently, various activities aligned with the SCERT textbooks were planned, tailoring each lesson to the way children preferred to learn.

The primary focus was on creating an environment where students could learn through their own experiences rather than traditional methods. So different language games were introduced. These games not only created interest in learning English but also helped enhance the children's skills. Each subsequent activity in class was designed to be comprehensible on a physical and emotional level, incorporating sports and other engaging methods.

Each lesson aimed to create a learning environment that the children loved, both inside and outside the classroom. Despite taking the lessons out of the classroom and into the school compound, the essence of the lessons was retained. Numerous

activities were carried out to mentally prepare the children for studying, aiming to maximize their engagement through a variety of activities tailored for each lesson.

For each class, passages were rephrased so that they became more understandable. When teaching poems, the lines were choreographed to help students grasp the ideas through dance. This method allowed the students to engage physically, mentally, and intellectually, leading to deeper learning. By involving all kinds of intelligence in the learning process, we could include all types of children in the learning journey.

In addition to dance, games and acting were used to make English interesting and enjoyable for the students. Through these three methods—dance, games, and acting—we could deliver English lessons in a way that sparked the children's interest and made learning enjoyable.

Specific activities that were part of the program

- **Poem choreography:** Poem Choreography can breathe life into poetry, transforming words into a visual and emotional experience. The students were asked to move in tune with the lines and enact a theme.
- **Dancing lines:** Create a short dance routine that represents a sentence or two lines of a poem, focusing on the actions and emotions expressed in the words.
- **Enacting the theme:** It involves bringing an abstract idea or concept to life through movement, creating a deeper understanding and emotional connection. Students enact the scenes of a story.
- **Charades in motion:** Act out vocabulary words or phrases through dance movements, and have classmates guess the word.
- **Sentence choreography:** Move bodies to represent sentence structure, punctuation, and emphasis.
- **Tableaux:** Freeze frames to depict key language concepts or sentence meanings
- **Raps or songs:** Compose and perform raps or songs that incorporate grammatical rules in a catchy way. Students are allowed to add more lines.
- **Mime:** Students act out language concepts without using words. Through miming the teacher delivers the main idea, and this can interest among the children.
- **Role-play:** Create situations where students need to use English to communicate, such as ordering food at a restaurant or asking for directions.



Image: Classroom activities conducted as part of the program. Source: Anila R.

Language games

These games involve the creative and competitive use of language, grammar and vocabulary games.

- **Bingo:** Create bingo cards with vocabulary words or phrases related to the topic being learned. Call out definitions or descriptions, and students mark the corresponding word if they have it.
- **Pictionary:** Draw a picture representing a word or phrase, and have classmates guess the word in English.

- **Hangman:** A guessing game where one player thinks of a word and the others try to guess the letters in the word. If they guess a wrong letter, they lose a life. The first player to guess the word wins.
- **I must ask you:** children's asking each other about their favourite things starting with the phrase I MUST ASK YOU.

Challenges

Conducting this project to enhance English language proficiency in primary school learners through integrating dance, acting, and games can be rewarding but also comes with several challenges. Some of these challenges are:

- **Student Engagement:** Ensuring that all students are engaged and benefit from these activities can be challenging, as different students may have varying levels of interest and ability in dance, acting, and games.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Being sensitive to the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of students when selecting and implementing these activities is important to ensure inclusivity and respect.
- **Curriculum Alignment:** Ensuring that the activities align with the curriculum standards and learning objectives can be challenging, as it may require creative adaptation and integration of the activities into the existing curriculum.
- **Resource Constraints:** Access to resources such as space, props, music, and costumes can be limited, especially in schools with limited budgets.
- **Time Constraints:** Integrating these activities into the curriculum may require additional time, which can be challenging due to the already packed school schedule.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers may require training and professional development to effectively integrate dance, acting, and games into their teaching practices.
- **Assessment and Evaluation:** Developing appropriate methods for assessing and evaluating student learning through these activities can be challenging, as traditional assessment methods may not always be suitable.

Addressing these challenges may require collaboration with school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to create a supportive and conducive environment.

Findings

The implementation of integrated dance, acting, and games into English language instruction yielded several noteworthy findings. It was observed that the students benefited in multiple ways as a result of the aforementioned activities. First of all, a positive learning environment could be created, where students felt motivated and engaged. Collaborative activities encouraged teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills, contributing to a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere. Secondly, the children gained confidence through gradual immersion in interactive and creative learning experiences. They overcame inhibitions and developed heightened confidence in using English in various contexts. They exhibited greater willingness to participate in English-speaking activities and demonstrated improved fluency and clarity in communication. Thirdly, the use of a range of activities enabled students with diverse learning styles to actively participate and learn better. The integration of kinesthetic, auditory, and visual elements into English language learning effectively catered to diverse learning styles, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all students. This dynamic approach enabled students to actively participate and succeed regardless of their preferred mode of learning. Finally, the students demonstrated improved language proficiency, including listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation skills. The multisensory nature of these activities facilitated a deeper understanding and retention of English language concepts.

Conclusion

The use of dance acting and games in the English language curriculum proved to be an effective strategy for enhancing student learning. These activities provided a fun and engaging way for students to practice and improve their English language skills. The interactive nature of the activities fostered collaboration and communication among students, further promoting language development, including by enhancing students' conceptualization and retention.

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Anila R is a committed teacher at GUPS Parlikad, Thrissur. She thrives on blending creativity into her teaching methods. Outside the classroom, she loves to travel, dance, play sports, and cook. She is passionate about discovering innovative ideas to enhance her students' learning experiences.

Theatrical Pedagogy: Fostering Learning through Acting in the English Classroom

Elizabeth Poullose

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Abstract

This paper explores the utilization of theatrical pedagogy as a means to enhance learning experiences. Theatre education, with its interdisciplinary approach, the possibility of dramatized interpretation, multimedia production and technical skill development, offers a platform for fostering creativity and imagination. Used in language teaching, theatre provides opportunities for talent presentation, ensures inclusivity across learner levels, promotes teamwork and self-discipline, and addressing multiple intelligences. Learning through acting helps in transacting language elements in the English classroom. Additionally, it actively engages students, increases reading motivation, and nurtures vital skills including communication, confidence, creativity, time management, critical thinking and problem solving.

Key Words: Content-based instruction, Krashen's hypothesis, Theatre for teaching and learning

Introduction

English is the language of international communication in all areas, including politics, science, technology, media and art. It is often the language of entertainment as well as socialising. Having a good command of English helps us to have more opportunities in life. Greater proficiency in English would lead to improvement in overall school performance. Proficiency in English encourages students to aspire for education abroad and opens up multiple career opportunities for students from rural and semi-urban backgrounds in India.

I have been using the method of theatre to make my English classroom more interesting and effective for my students for the past 13 years. My experience convinces me of its effectiveness in engaging learners of all levels.

I began using theatre in my English classes over a decade ago, when I began teaching. My aim was to create a more enjoyable learning experience for students hailing from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, tribal regions, and families of labourers, allowing them to speak English with confidence and joy, even in affluent class settings. This approach, which needed meticulous planning, gained momentum during the COVID pandemic, as online platforms provided a fertile ground for

implementing these ideas. Direct communication with students and their parents via phone helped foster a strong bond between me and the learners.

Following guidelines, 7th standard students practised segments of their lessons, often with the assistance of parents at home, which gradually enhanced the appeal of English classes. Interactive activities such as acting and games not only captured students' interest but also deepened their comprehension of language. Sharing educational content through YouTube channels benefitted students from underprivileged backgrounds and also helped those encountering difficulties in traditional classroom settings.

I used the method of "Reader's Theatre" in which children read aloud, conveying emotions, and giving emphasis at appropriate places. Involving minimal staging and props, this method relies heavily on the power of language and interpretation to engage the audience. This format allows for a focus on the text itself, making it a popular choice for exploring literature in educational settings. Such initiatives not only sparked creativity but also instilled a sense of responsibility and leadership among students.

My students fully embraced theatre as their own approach to explore the world. I chose theatre because it allowed us to immerse ourselves in a story as it happens live, right in front of our eyes. It gave us the chance to put ourselves in the characters' shoes and almost feel what they feel. Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory. The power of theatre is that it helps to create memories from fleeting moments of learning.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to explore the multifaceted benefits of integrating theatrical activities into language instruction. This approach aims to capitalize on learners' natural affinity for theatre, thereby enhancing engagement and participation in the teaching-learning process. It also seeks to create a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere through theatrical pedagogy, fostering a conducive environment for language acquisition. Additionally, acting activities are designed to boost learner motivation and develop skills such as time management and critical thinking. The study also aims to address various learning styles and intelligences, including physical coordination through Total Physical Response (TPR) and the stimulation of artistic and aesthetic impulses. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate that learning through acting can ensure inclusivity, providing opportunities for all learners to thrive and excel.

Perspectives on Theatre and Language Teaching

Theatre in education (TIE) started in Britain in the 1960s (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009). TIE has historically spread around the world and has opened the space for dramatic reading of a script that may or may not include props, staging and costumes (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Chou 2013; Clark et al, 2009; Lin, 2015; Peregoy et al, 2008; Ratliff 2000; Tindall, 2012).

Theatre and language learning share some of their foundational constructs. In the following sections, relevant ideas of second language acquisition and theatre are explored in relation to my own experiences.

- **Language Hypothesis**

In Krashen's framework of second language acquisition, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis stand out as crucial concepts. They emphasize the importance of comprehensible input and a low affective filter for language learning to occur optimally. In the theatre setting, non-native speakers find a welcoming environment where they can actively participate without fear of judgment or intimidation. In this context, the traditional didactic approach gives way to a more collaborative atmosphere, with the director acting as a facilitator and guide. This shift allows students to engage more authentically, finding their voice and confidence in expressing themselves through the medium of theatre. A lower affective filter is also associated in this case, with higher motivation. Motivation plays a crucial role in shaping the environment for learning. In foreign language teaching, focusing on motivation, which stems from personal desires and needs, enhances the learning process. Engaging in activities that are meaningful and inspiring promotes effective learning.

- **Authentic Environment**

Improvisation within theatre serves as a dynamic platform for holistic learning, engaging participants intellectually, physically, and intuitively. It offers an avenue for meaningful interaction, fostering authenticity in expression. By immersing individuals in experiential scenarios, improvisation becomes a potent tool for language acquisition, enabling students to navigate linguistic challenges through problem-solving and drawing upon their personal experiences. Furthermore, it nurtures creativity, instills a sense of playfulness, and cultivates the confidence to articulate thoughts and ideas fluidly, thus enriching both language learning and personal development.

- **Constructivism**

According to Herrera and Murry, language acquisition in a second language (L2) accelerates when learners are fully immersed in a communicative language learning environment. In such settings, learners effectively extract meaning from real-life

contexts and interactions, fostering a deep understanding of the language. Social constructivism underscores the significance of social interactions in the learning process, emphasizing language as a foundational tool for knowledge construction. By engaging in linguistic and social interactions centred around learning, individuals not only enhance their language skills but also actively contribute to their own cognitive development and understanding of the world around them.

- **Second Language (L2) Skills**

Listening skills refer to the ability to actively receive and understand information conveyed by another person during communication. It involves not only hearing the words being spoken but also comprehending their meaning, context, and underlying emotions. Effective listening requires concentration, empathy, and the willingness to engage with the speaker's message.

Speaking skills give one the capacity to articulate thoughts, ideas, and information clearly and effectively through spoken language. It involves not only verbal expression but also aspects like tone, pace, and body language. Effective speaking entails organizing thoughts coherently, adapting language to the audience or context, and engaging listeners through compelling delivery. Developing speaking skills enhances communication, fosters confidence, and facilitates effective interaction in various personal and professional settings.

Reading skills describe the ability to interpret written language and extract meaning from text. It involves decoding words, understanding vocabulary, and comprehending the overall message or information presented. Strong reading skills encompass various strategies such as skimming, scanning, and deep reading, depending on the purpose and context. Effective readers can analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information from a variety of sources to gain knowledge and understanding.

Writing skills refer to the ability to convey ideas, thoughts, and information through written language in a clear, coherent, and engaging manner. It involves composing sentences and paragraphs, organizing ideas logically, and effectively communicating intended messages to the reader. Strong writing skills encompass aspects such as grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, and style. Writers often employ techniques like persuasion, storytelling, or argumentation depending on the purpose and audience. Developing writing skills is essential for effective communication, academic success, and professional advancement. The L2 learner needs to have the ability to learn new words, to look up the meanings of words in the dictionary, know their relations to other words (synonyms, antonyms, etc.), their spellings and the usage of the words. If students are sufficiently trained in theatre, their vocabulary and ability to use language in specific contexts also improves.

Participating in theatre requires students to engage deeper with listening, speaking, reading and writing processes and results in the strengthening of these skills.

Strategies

The various steps or phases of the theatre programme are discussed in this section.

- **Phase 1 - Rapport Creation**

To start with, I engage the students in various language games, creating a friendly atmosphere. This not only fosters camaraderie among the classmates but also helps build a good rapport with the teacher."



Image: Teacher engaging the students in a language game. Source: Elizabeth Poulse

- **Phase 2 - Nature Walk**

The concept of "Nature Walk" is organized to cultivate affection for nature, understand it better, and observe it closely. As a result of this experience, children become careful observers of the world around them. Children, whether from different classrooms within the school or from the school premises itself, are brought together to participate in various nature-related activities. Collaborating and sharing with each other, they explore nature, thereby providing unique experiences.



Image: Students out on a nature walk. Source: Elizabeth Poulse

Following the nature walk, the description of nature encountered serves as an aid to activities like diary writing, journaling, conversations, letter writing and more, facilitating deeper bonding and making it easier to express affection towards nature.

- **Phase 3 - Love Letters**

Requesting the learners to craft, with care and consideration, a heartfelt love letter to their class teacher, expressing their talents, and accomplishments. The letters enable the teacher to understand each student more deeply and identify their unique qualities.

- **Phase 4 - Counselling**

Based on the what the students express in their love letters, I interact with them to help build confidence and self-assurance. Counselling serves as a conduit to address concerns stemming from academic challenges, ensuring the progression of learning.

- **Phase 5 - Group Activities**

Students who excel in both academics and extracurricular activities are placed in five groups. They are made the leaders of their groups the first time.

Students who are not doing very well in class are also placed in these groups, with the intent that the students support one another. Working in groups fosters cooperation as well as healthy competition, and children try to give their best. The best students can help their group members who are in need, and support them. Weekly rewards based on points encourage and motivate participants, thereby aiding in the active engagement of students. The leaders change every month, so every child gets a chance to become a leader.

- **Phase 6 - Rendering dialogue**

An interesting segment from any part of the textbook can be chosen to work on with a brief introduction by the teacher to set the scene. The whole class works on the same text or different groups can work on different parts of a text. Characters are assigned to learners who read out their dialogues. Longer descriptive passage that do not suit dramatic reading can be omitted.



Image: Students performing a skit based on a textbook lesson. Source: Elizabeth Poulse

Students can choose their roles. The learners try to highlight their dialogue, then practice it individually and in groups. The cast reads the play aloud for the audience. Some learners like to include costume suggestions, music and other elements. It depends upon the energy of the group leader and of course the team members. Finally, marks are given to the groups based on their performance and winners are given prizes. The best ones are selected and posted on the [YouTube channel \(My Gems vlogs\)](#). They are also presented in the class PTA and school annual day.

Findings

I explored how theatre training contributed to the development and enhancement of participants' L2 skills and competencies. The findings revealed several significant outcomes. Collaborative efforts fostered teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills, creating a positive classroom atmosphere. Moreover, students displayed enhanced language proficiency across various domains, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and pronunciation, through engaging game activities. They also demonstrated increased interest and fluency in speaking English, indicating improved communication and clarity.

I observed that active participation in the Readers Theatre transformed the children. Their theatrical abilities were stimulated and self-confidence enhanced. When they received acceptance and awards in the community during presentations, their faith in themselves increased and they did better in studies. They are strengthened by a sense of accomplishment. Such initiatives from the group transformed the children into socially responsible individuals, shaping their humane values and nurturing an empathetic nature.

Theatre provided students with an outlet for self-expression and encouraged them to think outside the box. Through theatre students explored new ideas and perspectives and developed their own unique identities. Drama, games and activities in the classroom convinced children to get involved in the act of learning. It also helped them become more comfortable with their peers and promoted fun and interest in the classroom. Moreover, acting bolstered learners' confidence in using the English language, empowering them to communicate effectively. Additionally, these activities promoted collaboration and communication skills, nurturing interactive learning experiences. They also instilled values of teamwork and self-discipline.

Overall, the learners exhibited greater creativity, energy, confidence, and dynamism in all aspects of their language development.

"Children absorb scenes faster than anything else. The teacher introduced a new teaching style by using engaging visuals to inspire and energize them, fostering a

stronger sense of purpose. These activities not only make learning enjoyable but also emphasize its significance." - Comment from a child's parent.

"When we ourselves portray characters in plays, those experiences deeply affect our minds, making learning easier and more enjoyable. Also, it also helps us do better in our examinations." A student (2020-23 batch)

Challenges and Limitations

The concept of "*Reader's Theatre*" is not just about engaging children for a day or a month in loud reading with emotions, voice modulation and emphasis. Even though training for a year through various strategies is essential, we cannot think of a one-size-fits-all approach that applies to all schools. Therefore, when such methods are implemented, practical challenges and time constraints may arise. Teachers who provide leadership in allowing children to explore independently may face challenges in managing diverse abilities, and time. The shortage of teachers poses a significant constraint on exploring possibilities. The dominance of the mother tongue in students thought and expression also can create cognitive barriers. The presentation of children's theatre outputs also requires financial support. Additionally, syllabus completion pressures lead to time constraints. Hence, we can understand the reluctance of teachers who show resistance to such methods.

Conclusion

Readers Theatre offers a unique opportunity for participants to explore the power of storytelling through the spoken word. By focusing on vocal delivery and interpretation rather than elaborate staging, readers can immerse themselves and their audience in the rich tapestry of a script's language and characters. Whether it is a classic play, a contemporary piece, or even original works, Readers Theatre invites readers to breathe life into the text, allowing each voice to resonate with its own unique cadence and emotion. This collaborative and intimate form of theatre not only hones reading and performance skills but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the nuances of language and the art of storytelling. Whether you're an actor honing your craft or simply a lover of literature, Readers Theatre promises an engaging and enriching experience for all involved.

Character acting/ performing keeps us physically active and mentally sharp. Performing in plays improves pronunciation and enunciation skills. Being live on stage improves self-confidence as well as prepares students for the professional presentations they will make in future. Hence, organizing online and offline classes to elucidate the importance and functioning of Readers Theatre is recommended for

primary schools. Teachers should consider forming Readers Theatre in their institutions.

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E-LIFE: Cultivating English Fluency in Primary Students

Shibu E P
GWUPS Ponnore

Introduction

In today's globalized world, proficiency in the English language is essential for academic success, career opportunities, and social mobility. English is not just a subject to be learned but a vital skill that opens doors to global communication, access to information, and participation in the broader cultural and economic spheres. English language learning in schools lays the foundation for students to succeed in higher education, secure better employment, and interact effectively in an increasingly interconnected world. Recognizing the importance of English proficiency, the English Club E-LIFE (English - Learning Interestingly, Fluently, and Effectively) was established to help students learn English in a fun and interactive way. At our school, many students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and fewer parents are able to provide support from home in academic matters, especially English language learning. There was an alienation and fear of the English language among the children. To address this, I thought of creating an environment where students could use the language naturally beyond the regular classrooms. This led to the creation of the E-LIFE project.

The English Club E-LIFE was established to help students learn English in a fun and interactive way. The club's aims were to improve students' language skills and encourage them to speak English fluently without any fear or hesitation and provide a platform for them to express their thoughts, ideas, and creativity.

Objectives

The objectives of the E-LIFE program are to enhance students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) skills in English, build their confidence to speak English fluently without fear or hesitation, and provide a platform for them to express their thoughts, ideas, and creativity. Additionally, the program aims to engage students in meaningful and enjoyable activities that promote the use of English beyond the classroom, encourage peer learning and support, and help students overcome their fear of speaking English and build self-confidence.

Implementation

The teacher played a facilitator's role in this effort. The school's auditorium provided a convenient venue. The club members were divided into five groups, each led by a leader, and there was an overall leader to oversee the activities. Each group consisted of students from classes 1 to 7. The club's activities were held every day, with each group taking turns to participate.

All activities were designed to develop children's LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) language skills. Self-introduction, storytelling, nature walks, language games, poem recitation, picture description, and profile presentations were arranged in a way that promoted children's reading and writing skills. Diary writing, letter writing, and interviews encouraged children to engage in conversations and develop their writing skills. Magazine writing and skit writing were included to inspire children's writing skills. These activities are discussed in the same sequence as they were transacted through the club. Each activity had some immediate and somewhat unique benefits, these are discussed along with the activity.

The Activities: What and How

- **Self-Introduction:** The first activity was for students to introduce themselves. By coming on stage and introducing themselves, children developed confidence and became ready for the other tasks.
- **Storytelling:** The second activity was storytelling, where children told small stories to their friends. This helped build their confidence and stage presence, and encouraged creativity and self-expression.
- **Nature Walk:** Children were taken to safe and open spaces like gardens, parks, or playgrounds for a nature walk. They were encouraged to explore and observe their surroundings, and interact with their teachers and friends. This helped them learn new vocabulary and communicate freely without the constraints of being in a classroom.
- **Language Games:** A variety of language games made the programme engaging and fun. In one game played the children had to perform actions corresponding to a verb. In another game, children worked in teams and had to elicit correct words from the members of other teams by giving certain clues. They also played spelling games.
- **Picture Description:** Children drew pictures, made textbook illustrations, and created classroom charts. The picture description activity helps children develop grammatical understanding and creative writing skills. Besides helping children develop the ability to write, this activity also prepared them for examinations, where they needed to write.

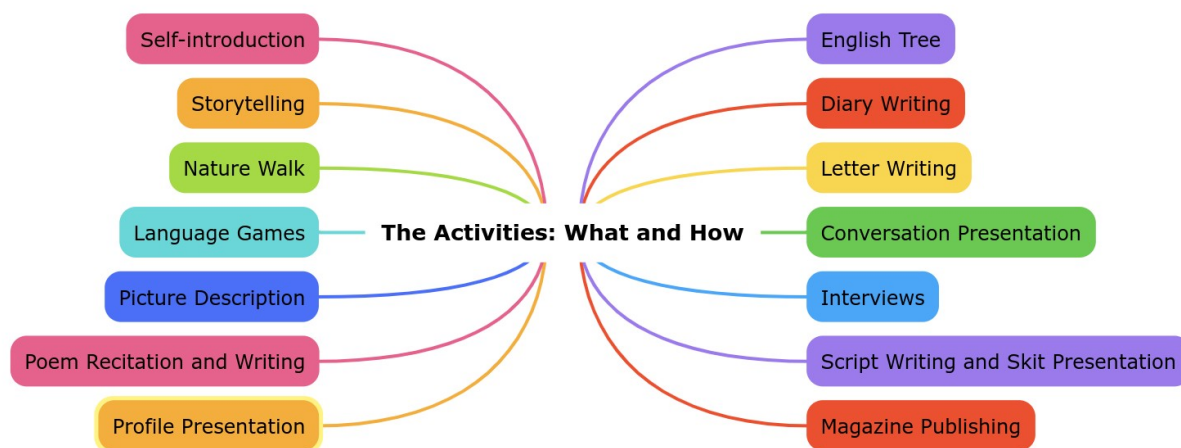
- **Poem Recitation & Writing:** Children were encouraged to write their own poems and recite them. The poems were written using simple words, inspired by topics like mother, flowers, animals, and more. This activity, like the picture description task, helped develop their creativity and language skills. Enacting their poems, enhanced their language development and their self-confidence. It also motivated other children to write, fostering a supportive environment that encouraged creative expression.
- **Profile Presentation:** Presenting profiles of famous personalities such as scientists, athletes, freedom fighters, politicians, and other prominent individuals helped children improve their language skills and confidence. In addition to language development, this also helped students in their SSLC exams, where they are required to write similar profiles. This activity helps children feel less disconnected from formal contexts like standard written examinations.
- **English Tree:** An English tree was set up on the stage. Every day, children were expected to bring new words they had learned and attach them to the tree. This activity helped increase vocabulary and encouraged children to learn and use new words in different contexts. The tree was decorated with charts and papers containing new words, which the children excitedly brought and hung on the tree, creating a colourful and interactive learning display.



Image: Classroom activities conducted as part of the program. Source: Shibu E P

- **Diary Writing:** As part of this activity, children wrote about the previous day's events in a diary format. This helped them practice sentence-making and tense usage, and they also learned new vocabulary. Diary writing made writing easier and more enjoyable.
- **Letter Writing:** Based on the activities in their lessons, students wrote letters about daily events, special occasions, and other topics. Through this letter writing activity, children learned the essential skills to write letters effectively in their daily lives, understanding the key elements to consider in this process.
- **Conversation Presentation:** Students presented conversations based on situations from their lessons or their daily lives. In pairs, they prepared and presented their conversations face-to-face, promoting speaking skills, confidence, and dialogue formation. This activity helped students improve their communication skills and their self-confidence.
- **Interviews:** Selected students played the roles of chief guests on stage, imagining themselves as prominent figures in society. They were asked questions by their peers, who came with prepared questions in English, about the pretend "chief guests" field of activity, experiences, achievements, and personal lives. This activity helped children improve their speaking skills, overcome inhibition, and learn to ask questions effectively. Moreover, this activity was engaging and interactive, in which the students practised their English skills in real-life settings.
- **Script Writing & Skit Presentation:** Children were divided into groups and asked to prepare a skit based on any lesson from their textbook. This activity helped them create simple English sentences and dialogues, promoting language development and creativity. As they progressed, they learned to present their skits, developing their communication skills, confidence, leadership, teamwork, and other essential attributes. Though it was a time-consuming activity, it played a vital role in building children's self-confidence and speaking skills.
- **Magazine Publishing:** The magazine, prepared by the children, included descriptions of all their activities, letter writing, picture descriptions, conversations, nature walk experiences, their thoughts, and profiles they created, along with picture descriptions and more. This carefully crafted magazine showcased the diverse talents of the children, highlighting their achievements and creativity. The magazine was a wonderful product of their hard work and dedication, a testament to their skills and creativity."

The dream is to have English-speaking classrooms in every school, where students can engage in conversations, read texts, write essays, and enjoy language labs, making English language learning a delightful experience.



Graphic: Classroom activities conducted as part of the program. Source: Shibu E P

Limitations

The time allocated for this project was after lunch, a time that is very beloved to the children as it is also their playtime. It was indeed a challenge to bring the children into study mode by shifting their playtime to the evening. Particularly, attracting students to the English language, was difficult. However, once the children understood the benefits of these sessions, it became a tradition for the students to enthusiastically invite teachers for the sessions.

Another challenge was getting cooperation of teachers. Finding a time slot for this, amidst their other responsibilities was difficult. Although it required some initial effort, we eventually received full cooperation from the teachers.

The lack of support from parents who did not gain good education because of their lower socioeconomic backgrounds was a challenge we had to overcome. Similarly, students lacked self-confidence and had stage fear, which was an obstacle for their development.

Outcomes

Although children were initially disinterested, they later became enthusiastic participants, eagerly engaging in reciting poems, writing stories, and conducting interviews. They even started calling out to their teachers to come and watch their performances. The younger children also showed great interest in presenting their

programmes and eagerly asked their teachers to let them perform. During the interviews, they showed a keen interest in asking questions and even pretended to be interviewers on stage. They also drew beautiful pictures and wrote descriptions with great enthusiasm.

When the image description activity was given, the children drew pictures and accurately identified the objects in them. They then created sentences about these objects in English and learned how to construct a sentence. They were able to write simple sentences and understand the word order in the English language. Even in exams, they were able to perform well and get good grades. By learning to create simple sentences, their vocabulary improved, and they gained confidence in writing English sentences on their own.

Through diary writing, children were able to reflect on their daily activities and understand how to write in English. They learned that past events should be written in the past tense and were able to understand and use verb tenses correctly. They improved their sentence structure and vocabulary, and were able to write simple sentences. This activity helped them to overcome their initial difficulties with writing and improved their writing skills, which in turn helped them to perform well in exams and achieve good grades.

Peer learning emerged as a significant benefit of E-LIFE as students were generally helpful to each other. The students' self-motivation increased and their stage fear decreased. Parents observed their children speaking English confidently, which was a pleasant surprise for them. Activities like picture description, diary writing, and character analysis helped students master essential skills and prepare independently.

The success of E-LIFE is marked by the active involvement and cooperation of parents, colleagues, teachers, and students. The enthusiasm and love for the activities among the children were clearly observed. Significant improvements were observed in students' speaking abilities, response times, vocabulary development, and sentence pattern writing.

Conclusion

E-LIFE has not only achieved its goals but has also laid a strong foundation for English fluency among our primary students. The programme has shown that with the right strategies and dedicated time, students can significantly improve their English language skills. By fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment, E-LIFE has empowered students to overcome their fear of speaking and has instilled a love for the English language.

The basic principles of the programme, which enabled its success are – providing children meaningful and enjoyable activities to engage them, encourage peer learning and support, create an environment free of fear, which allowed children to

experiment and learn. The wide variety of activities ensured every child was 'hooked' to one or the other activity, making this process inclusive. Getting the support of other teachers and parents allowed the program to take firm root in the school. The extraordinary value of this program lies in the 'ordinariness' of the activities, all of which are familiar part of ELT, but what was truly extraordinary was the enormous and sustained efforts from all – students, teachers and parents.

As we continue to refine and expand this programme, we remain committed to providing our students with the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

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Enhancing Learners' Writing Skills at the Primary Level, through Picture Description

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Abstract

In Kerala, English is taught as a second language. Teaching English in the school is a challenge, especially in lower primary classes. Students try to read but they find writing difficult. In this study, I investigate the effectiveness of pictures in helping children to write. When pictures were used to teach writing, it was observed that the students showed improvement. This classroom action research aimed to understand how to develop the writing skills of children in lower primary classes by using pictures as a hook for word learning, over three cycles. Each cycle consisted of four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

Introduction

English is a second language in all the primary and secondary schools in Kerala. Communicating with others or expressing our ideas is a part of human nature. Languages can be seen as a tool for communication, and speaking holds a special significance for the learners of any language. Speaking can be thought of as a productive skill aimed at enabling communication. The purpose of this study is to determine whether using picture description can enhance students' writing skills in English.

Innovative methods and strategies are crucial in English language teaching for keeping pace with evolving language trends, adapting to diverse learner needs, and fostering engagement. They enhance student motivation, cater to different learning styles, and promote active participation, ultimately leading to more effective language acquisition. English language education dynamically responds to a rapidly changing world. New teaching methodologies encourage educators to explore new technologies that work in different cultural contexts. To implement these methodologies, it is essential to empower teachers in the areas of knowledge and techniques. This will enable the teachers to develop effective methods and provide enjoyable, inclusive and effective learning experiences for the students.

Our students in Lower Primary classes found English difficult. I carefully studied the difficulties that my students were facing while writing a description. I noticed that they find it difficult to respond when I ask them questions in English. So, to overcome

this problem I performed actions related to the characters in the story and made them speak the word. They also started to make small sentences. Their reading capacity also improved. This study focused on improving writing and summarising skills.

According to Harmer (2007:118) a picture offers a wealth of learning possibilities. We can ask students to write descriptions of one of a group of pictures; their classmate then have to guess which one it is. They can write postcards based on pictures we give them. We can get them to look at portraits and write the thoughts of the characters or their diaries, or an article about them. All of these activities are designed to get students writing freely, in an engaging way. According to Wright (1989) pictures enhance students' interest in lessons and increase their motivation for learning. They get a better sense of how to use language in specific contexts.

Objectives

The objective of the action research was to understand ways of ensuring effective teaching of English at the lower primary level, and to ensure showcasing of students' skills and achievements. This was sought to be done by preparing different description activities and by making students use simple English while answering the interaction questions, and by developing an English atmosphere in the classroom. The overall objective was that all students should be able to write in English.

Methods

Initially teachers have to analyze and interpret the performance of the children. I used different methods in my class to overcome the difficulty that children experience with English. In a lower primary class of 42 students, the problem experienced was that the children were not able to understand when I communicated with them in English. So, I used to show the characters of the lesson that I took in the class, and the children identified the character from that. I tried different methods to help the children learn English. One of them was based on my observation that the children in my class love to draw. I decided to make all the children in the class draw. First, I gave them an instruction in English, such as 'draw a tree'. They understood my instruction in simple English and drew it. They did not find this activity difficult.

Then I asked them to describe the word tree. I gave them examples to make them start describing things. I asked them to elaborate the word **tree** and the phrases **a tree**, **a big tree**, and **a beautiful tree**. From this I asked them to write some sentences using 'This'. They produced simple sentences involving these phrases, such as 'This is a tree', 'This is a big tree' and 'This is a beautiful tree'.

After this I asked the children to draw the birds on the tree and ask them to make sentences using the word 'there'. They produced sentences like 'There are many birds on the tree'. When this activity was given, 50% of the children wrote full sentences, 30% attempted to write full sentences, and 20% wrote words and not full sentences.

After that I introduced the bird 'parrot'. I drew a picture of the parrot in the chart. Then I wrote some interesting features of the parrot such as 'beautiful', 'green' in colour, it 'talks' (imitates human language), etc. From this I asked them to write sentences about the parrot. When I entered the characteristics of the bird in a **word web** (an example of a word web is on page 5), I could see how the children have improved. I noticed that out of the 50% of students who could write full sentences, 70% of them were writing very well; 15% wrote with some grammatical mistakes and 5 % attempted to write. Essential components that I considered while analysing the students' productions are the learning levels of the students, what kind of linguistic output they were able to come up with, their ability to integrate language skills, their abilities to connect ideas across disciplines, and how they performed in assessments.

First a picture was shown to the children on the projector. They were then given the opportunity to name the characters in the picture or simply say what they could see in it. The children named the characters in the picture one by one and the objects they saw in it. After naming the characters, I asked them some questions based on the picture. After that they were asked to describe the picture orally. Subsequently they answered the questions. I asked them to write about that picture.



Image: Sample picture shown to students for the activity. Source: Kulirma Beevi

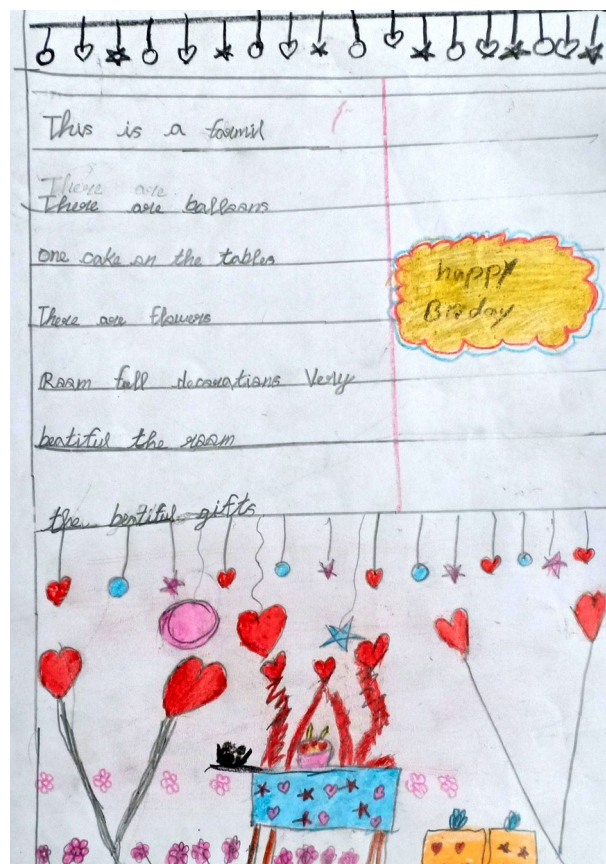
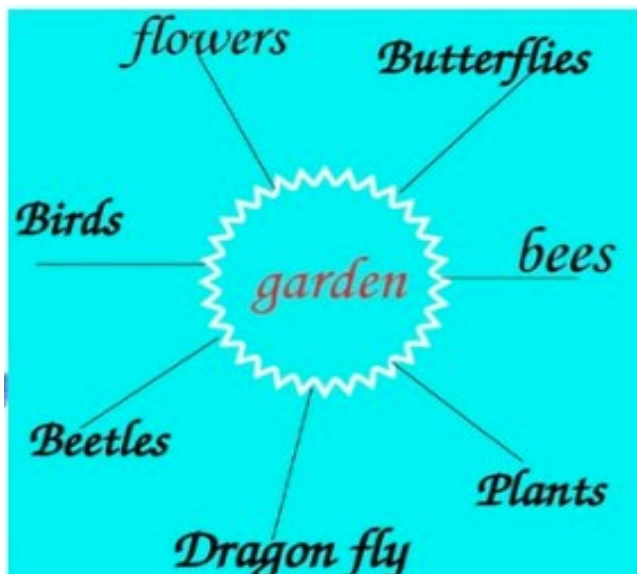


Image: Sample word-web used by the teacher (above) and description by one of the students (right). Source: Kulirma Beevi

Secondly, I projected the picture of a garden and asked them to describe the picture one by one. After that, I showed the word-web. The children wrote the descriptions using the help of the word web.

According to Lori Brenneise, landscape paintings can be used to help children learn writing (Brenneise, 2021). I applied some of these ideas in my teaching and noticed that they really benefitted the children.

Hide and seek

I taught prepositions to students by incorporating the game of hide and seek. First, I wrote a word on a small piece of paper and hid it. I then provided a hint to help the children find the paper, thereby learning the preposition in the process.

To start, I asked the children to form a circle and gave one of them a cap. When I said "start," they passed the cap around. When I said "stop," the child holding the cap had to pick up a slip of paper. The child then followed the instructions on the slip to find the next slip, which contained the correct answer. For example, if the target word was the name of a bird, the first slip might instruct the child to look **behind** the door.

Following the instructions, the students discovered the name of the bird and talked about it to other students using simple sentences. Small pictures corresponding to the prepositions (in, on, at, by, behind, over, across, etc.) were also used in this game. These pictures were hidden in similar places, and pieces of paper containing

sentences with the prepositions were used to guide the students to the hidden items. When we conducted this activity in class, many children found the answers, making it a great activity for children of all levels to repeat. When I encouraged the children participate in these activities, I could see positive changes in them. They could read, utter words and make sentences on their own. When I made them write, I noticed some mistakes. The main errors that I detected were syntactic, morphological and those related to spellings and punctuation. I helped them correct their mistakes one by one. Individual and group presentations were also conducted in my class. In my experience, such presentations inspire students to carry out these activities. The children were very enthusiastic and tried to talk about each picture in the class when they saw it. Some children tried to use only simple words. But some of the students produced grammatically correct sentences. Many students produced sentences with minor grammatical errors. The children who are usually not comfortable with speaking English also made an effort to try to speak and write the words. They narrated every scene and incident shown in the pictures. The children corrected their products and tried to convert it into a magazine. They edited the contents individually and in groups. What the children produced have been kept as samples.

In addition to showing pictures and asking children to write sentences, I narrated stories in the class and asked questions related to those stories. The children were also asked to find the answers to the questions and write them down. I explained to the children that a story can be written in different ways and provided them with suggestions. Later, we carried out a similar activity in class called "Add More Lines." All these activities helped children cultivate the basics of writing.

Findings

These activities increased the confidence level of the children. As a result of these activities, English became an interesting subject for the children. A variety of engaging activities were implemented in my class to promote language development and reinforce writing skills. I learnt that pictures, word webs, games like hide and seek, and story-related exercises are excellent ways to encourage participation and learning. After these activities, children began to show a greater interest in learning. Their interest and their ability to learn other subjects like mathematics and environmental studies also improved. Because of these reasons, working as an English teacher has been very gratifying for me. The work we do can have a general and lasting impact on the children's learning and worldviews.

Conclusions

For young children, providing a concrete basis for their learning can work much better than abstract ideas. Writing itself, can sometimes be abstract, which can hinder young children from engaging with it. In our action research, the use of

pictures, word webs, classroom objects (doors etc.) helped students in their visualizing and thinking while writing. Secondly, meaning-making was aided through contextualizing the learning process. For instance, the proposition was meaningful to the learner in context – ‘behind the door’ indicated to the child that she/he must go behind the door to find the next clue. Thus, embedding the meaning in the context, enabled better engagement and learning. Thirdly, encouraging students to present their work strengthened their interest and abilities to produce. This and most other group activities in this research supported peer learning amongst the students. Peer learning encouraged students who are behind their classmates, to learn from them in tacit ways, bridging these learning gaps over time.

Writing is perhaps the most difficult of the LSRW skills and scaffolding the learning of writing can help students to become comfortable with it. The group work and peer learning enable the learning process to equitable and inclusive. A teacher must be able to apply learning methods that are fun and actively involve students in the learning process, and also use appropriate learning media that can attract students’ interest to make learning writing easier.

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*As a dedicated and passionate teacher, **Kulirma Beevi** is committed to inspiring young minds and fostering a love for learning. Her classroom is her happy place, and her students are her greatest joy. She cherishes the opportunity to watch them grow, learn, and flourish. Her interests are music, films, travel and, of course, her class and her students.*

From Emojis to Discourses 🤔🤔💬

Bindu K
LPSA RSLPS Enkakkad

Abstract

Our primary school students face many problems while learning English. Since English is a second language, students usually get lesser input compared to their mother tongue. We need to help children overcome their difficulties. In this article, I put forward the idea that emojis can be used for helping language learning. I try to show that incorporating emojis into classroom discussions can help students express their thoughts and feelings more effectively, resulting in a deeper understanding of complex ideas.

Introduction

Emojis are symbols that are used in digital communication (using mobile and computer applications) to convey emotions. They usually stand for a facial expression, conveying a person's feelings or mood. Because of the inability to communicate body language in social media, they play an important role in communication today. They offer a specific tone and feeling for a written text and improve the receiver's interpretation about something that was discussed in a certain conversation. These realistic representations of feelings alter the manner in which people communicate; they make it quicker and easier.

The use of emojis often allows individuals to immediately make sense when added to any conversation. They show a point of view either outside of language or within a reciprocally understood language. Emojis are also favored by people who may not be very skilled in showing their feelings in words (Andrade Jr. et al., 2016).

As children love emojis, we can make use of them in their English learning. Children can move to learning words, sentences and, finally, meaningful passages in English from emojis.

One of the barriers in second language learning is that most students do not get much exposure in their primary classroom. Secondly, lack of interest and motivation also come in the way of learning English. Most students are not interested in learning the language; they are mostly concerned about passing the course examinations. Students who are not motivated enough do not learn and whatever little they may pick up will be forgotten soon (Raju & Joshith, 2017).

This paper is based on observations made in the classroom of standard 4 at RSLPS Enkakkad, in rural Thrissur. The students are from middle class families, and

otherwise heterogenous, and learning activities are planned based on their varied needs.

- **Emojis as a code system:** Emojis are like a secret language made of little pictures. Each emoji represents something specific, like a smiley face standing for happiness or a pizza slice standing for pizza itself. They help us show emotions, like joy or sadness, and can even change the tone of a message. Emojis are universal, so people from different cultures understand them. They're like tiny symbols that make our messages more fun and expressive, adding feelings and meanings that words alone might miss.
- **Motivation for the Work:** The primary English classes aim to equip children to work with discourses such as descriptions, conversations, and writing of thoughts. But children find these activities difficult. The task of writing meaningful sentences itself can be very challenging because their vocabulary is inadequate and they lack confidence. My primary task was to create interesting English classrooms. English plays a vital role in India, so learning it becomes a relevant factor in the life of all Indian citizens. People are generally aware of the significance of English. I wanted to explore if Emojis could be used to help my students improve their English communication skills.

Objectives

Students must enrich their vocabulary through various language activities. In the normal classroom the student can develop their vocabulary only through reading their course materials and absorbing a few words from the teachers. In the classroom, they get the chance to learn only a limited vocabulary.

Teachers must motivate young learners to read stories, newspapers, and magazines. Teachers can also motivate them to enrich their vocabulary through various classroom activities such as debates, discussions and role-plays. One of the best and fastest ways of enriching vocabulary is the use of emojis. Apart from increasing vocabulary, we can also teach children to improve sentence construction by using emojis.

Once children are confident enough to write meaningful sentences, they can move on to discourses. This will improve their confidence level which will directly reflect in their language proficiency. In this era every parent wants their children to speak English, write English and think in English. If a teacher can do anything in this regard it would be appreciable. So our objective is to make a difference in children's level of language competence using emojis, which are simple and omnipresent in the digital world.

Activities

While designing activities for children, we need to keep the following factors in mind. Children tend to be very receptive to ideas when they are in a secure and positive frame of mind. Children are usually very curious, imaginative, energetic, responsive to others' emotional states and creative. While designing activities for children, we need to keep this in mind, in addition to the fact that there are variations in children's social skills and resilience. The following are the instructions given to the children

- **Step 1. Identify the emoji:** Show the children different emojis and ask them to give the English words corresponding to them, such as 'happy', 'sad', 'confused' and 'surprised'.
- **Step 2. Collect and list out emojis:** After identifying the familiar emojis try to collect and list a maximum number of emojis with the help of all students. Students can be asked to give the corresponding words also. This can lead to improvement in vocabulary.
- **Step 3. Make a sentence using emojis:** Students are directed to write sentences on a given emoji. For example, consider the emoji:



This emoji stands for the emotional state of being 'happy'. So the student has to produce sentences like –

I am happy.

You are happy.

We are happy.

They are happy.

He is happy

She is happy. etc.

- **Step 4. Writing Sentences with Emojis:**

Some examples are –

I am sad.

He was confused.

They are surprised.

Rahul got angry.

It is done, congratulations!

Proud of you!

- **Step 5. Continuous Practice:** Once a child is able to see the connections between emojis and words, they need to keep practicing regularly to make progress. After considerable practice, children begin to use language without much of a conscious effort. However, to make sentences, children need to

have an understanding of tense forms, singular and plural forms of verbs, word orders of sentences and so on. As the children practice more, their confidence and their ability to make meaningful sentences also improve.

- **Step 6. Writing Discourses with Emojis:** When students begin to understand and use emojis, their visual literacy skills also improve. They learn to interpret symbols and understand how meaning can be conveyed through images, which is an important aspect of communication in today's digital world. Emojis provide a simple and effective way for students to express their emotions, both in written and spoken language. So, what is common in the digital world can be imported into the written and spoken modalities. This can be particularly helpful for young learners who may be struggling to articulate their feelings with words alone.

Exploring emojis introduces students to a wide range of vocabulary related to emotions, actions, objects, and more. Teachers can incorporate emoji-based activities to expand students' vocabulary and encourage them to use the language they so acquired to describe objects and events. Emojis represent cultural symbols and expressions shared by people across the world. By exploring different emojis and their meanings, students gain insight into diverse cultures and perspectives, promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity. Emojis can inspire creativity in writing activities. Students can use emojis to brainstorm ideas, illustrate their stories, or add emotional depth to their characters and dialogue.

Findings

Emojis are a valuable teaching tool in the primary English classroom, enhancing engagement, fostering communication skills, and promoting cultural understanding and creativity among young learners. When I began with a laughing emoji on a big screen my students' faces also mirrored that. They were highly thrilled and excited while watching the next emojis. They knew more emojis than I expected. They could follow the sentence patterns also. When I started a sentence, I happily showed the emoji and asked children to make more they could do it easily.



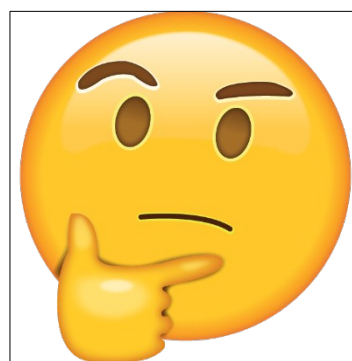
Sad



Screaming in fear



Angry



Confused

They started with simple structures like *"You are happy,"* and *"We are happy."* Then they moved on to sentences which had their own names in subject positions. After they produced all the sentences with 'happy' following this pattern, they moved on to adjectives corresponding to other emojis. The children divided themselves into groups and played games like acting out an emoji and asking another team to identify it. In addition, a test was conducted to check the number of sentences a student could make with a single emoji. Even students who usually need more support from the teacher for their classroom activities could write sentences like 'I am happy', 'I am sad' and 'I am surprised'.

Use of Emojis as an effective pedagogy

Emojis offered an attractive strategy for children's language learning, due to their visual appeal. Emojis are colorful and visually appealing, making learning materials more engaging for children. The use of vibrant symbols captured their attention and stimulated their interest in the subject matter. Secondly, emojis helped children to make an emotional connection to what they learn. When learning about abstract concepts or complex topics, emojis provided a familiar and relatable way of expressing emotions and reactions, fostering a deeper connection to the material. Thirdly, learning activities became more interesting when emojis were used, as children were excited to use emojis to respond to questions, express opinions and engage with their peers. All these contributed to the creation of a dynamic learning environment.

Fourthly, the fact that emojis helped us transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, which made them effective for communication and expression across these boundaries. The fifth benefit of using emojis was that they acted as memory aids because they helped children associate words or ideas with images, which in turn enhanced their learning experiences. The sixth benefit was that emojis enhanced children's creativity and expressive abilities. Finally, emojis acted as a gateway to digital literacy. Because of all these reasons, the use of emojis in the language

classroom created a more dynamic and effective learning environment. Children became more confident and showed noticeable improvement in their vocabularies. They learnt to use words in discourse-appropriate ways suitable to their age.

Conclusion

Emojis offer new possibilities of communication because they complement and augment the contents of text messages. A standard writing system starts with a 'signifier' like "house" to refer to a specific house (the 'signified', to use Saussure's terms). In contrast to this, emojis offer the potential to simplify communication using pictorial representations, avoiding long-drawn descriptions. Emojis, in that sense, enhance the written word and do not replace it.

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Bindu K is working as LPSA in RSLPS Enkakkad in Thrissur district, Kerala. With 30 years of teaching experience, she always likes to try out different strategies in the classroom. She is enthusiastic about planning and executing innovative ideas for students with diverse needs. She wants to continue working as a teacher with a difference.



Innovative Methods and Strategies for English Language Teaching: Models and Classroom Experiences

Unlocking Worlds: The Transformative Power and Endless Adventures found in Reading!

Remya Gopal
National HSS Irinjalakuda

"There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is the best of all".
Jacqueline Kennedy

Introduction

In a world overflowing with information, fostering a love for reading not only enhances academic performance but also cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and a lifelong passion for learning. It is crucial to create a habit of reading among students. We can make students aware of the idea that reading can help students develop crucial life skills and it will also prepare them for a bright and successful future.

Reading is one of the most important skills to be cultivated with respect to language and it is an essential tool for lifelong learning for all learners. Both parents and teachers play an important role in promoting reading habits. In many cases, learning to read and write starts at home, long before children go to school. Very early, children begin to learn about the sounds of spoken language when they hear their family members talking, laughing, and singing, and when they respond to all of the sounds that fill their world. They begin to understand the power of the written language when they hear adults read stories to them and see adults reading newspapers, magazines, and books for themselves. Learning to read is difficult and does not happen naturally. It requires explicit and systematic support, especially for struggling readers. Learning to read involves many different skills that must be taught to your child. Instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension will help your child learn to read (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Objectives of improving reading culture among my students

The primary objective of helping students to cultivate a reading habit is to promote literacy skills. Enhancing students' reading abilities improves overall literacy skills. In our school, we motivated students to read regularly both in and outside the classroom. Our second objective was to explore how technology can be leveraged to make reading more engaging for high school students. Another objective was to build community involvement in supporting and encouraging reading habits among

children. We also wanted to make varied kinds of reading material available for children so that children with different interests and at different reading levels got a diverse range of reading materials. We were keen to integrate reading improvement initiatives into the existing school curriculum, and wanted to establish methods for assessing and tracking students' progress in improving their reading habits. Our final objective was to examine the role of the teacher in guiding and motivating students to develop better reading habits.

Strategies for cultivating interest in reading

My journey as an English teacher began in 2015, and an initial idea that I had for promoting language learning involved organizing a Book Review Competition on Reading Day to foster a reading culture among high school students. Initially, it was challenging as many lacked confidence in reviewing books. However, by providing proper guidance and support to selected students, they delivered outstanding presentations, inspiring me to encourage more students to participate voluntarily in the following years.

This is how I guided my students. Five students from each class, most comfortable in English, were selected by me. They were then asked to tell stories of the books they had read. Although they performed adequately, there was much scope for improvement. Consequently, I endeavoured to locate the actual books they had borrowed from the library and instructed them to reread those books. Certain books were of manageable length, which made it easier for them to read. However, for those who chose longer stories, abridged versions of such books were sought out from the library. It was then understood that such books were not available in our library. Due to time constraints, a decision was made to search for them on the internet, and then the students asked to read them. Students without internet access remained in school, where they got an opportunity to read. After 3 or 4 days, they presented their own reviews. These were checked by me, edited, and supplemented as necessary. With the assistance of my colleagues, mistakes were corrected, and students were prepared to present in the school assembly on reading day.

To kickstart the process, maximizing the use of Reading Corners in the classroom was crucial, urging both students and parents to contribute books. The reading corners were selected in particular areas of each classroom. In those classes with sufficient space, books were arranged in the almirah, while in others, they were placed on the shelf. The books were classified based on language (Malayalam, English, and Hindi literature), and further categorized into short stories, novels, and other genres. The proficiency in reading books in their own mother tongue was assessed by asking questions such as "Why was this book enjoyable to you?" and "Who are the main characters?" and so on. Another technique employed involved displaying photos of distinguished writers from both Malayalam and English literature, prompting

students to recognize them. This was facilitated through ICT classes. Additionally, students were encouraged to explore other works by these writers. I shared personal recommendations of books that I had read. A crucial step involved instructing students to maintain a log of books they had read, noting down important characters, striking quotes, and other details. This log was to be kept by them. When I applied this technique in one of the higher-level classes, with 30 eighth-grade students, positive responses were received. That means many of the students in the selected class were familiar with numerous eminent Malayalam writers like M T Vasudevan Nair, Madhavikutty (Kamala Das) and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer. The writers were identified by them, and suggestions for other works by these writers were made. Furthermore, they stepped forward to collect and read additional works by these writers. Additionally, the habit of noting down the names and other details of the books they had read was initiated by the students.

The class was divided into six groups, each with appointed leaders and assigned tasks. Initially, stories from Malayalam literature were introduced and also books by Indian English writers like Sudha Murthy, R. K. Narayan and Kamala Das were included. This initiative aimed to foster interest in reading by starting with their native language. Then the students explored Malayalam literature, utilizing collaborative learning and also through bilingualism.

Collaborative (or cooperative) Learning

Collaborative (or cooperative) learning approach involves pupils working together on activities or learning tasks in a group small enough to ensure that everyone participates. Pupils in the group may work on separate tasks contributing to a common overall outcome, or work together on a shared task.

{<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>}

Bilingualism (multilingualism) refers to the coexistence of more than one language system within an individual. According to research, learning a language through one's first language (L1) can help improve English skills. This is because bilingual speakers are more likely to learn a language skilfully if they are fluent in their L1 {International Encyclopaedia of Education Third Edition, 2010}.

Following this programme, I began engaging with English books, introducing stories like Cinderella, The Sleeping Beauty and moral tales such as "The Golden Egg," "The Fox and The Grapes," "A Woodcutter," "The Angel," and *Panchatantra* stories, as I thought these stories would interest the students.

To commence this initiative, the process began with compiling a catalogue of the English books. Although the library housed an extensive collection, which included English classics, a noticeable hindrance was the small font size and unappealing layout of the existing books which could discourage students from reading (Kazemi et al., 2012).

Recognizing the importance of an enriching reading environment, the Headmistress was approached, and a request for additional funding to enhance the English literature section was made. Thankfully, approval was granted for the allocation of Rs. 2,000 to acquire a multitude of classic works in abridged versions such as 'Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' 'Peter Pan,' 'Alice in Wonderland,' 'Robinson Crusoe' and more. Now, students had access to a visually appealing and diverse collection, fostering a more engaging and enjoyable reading experience.

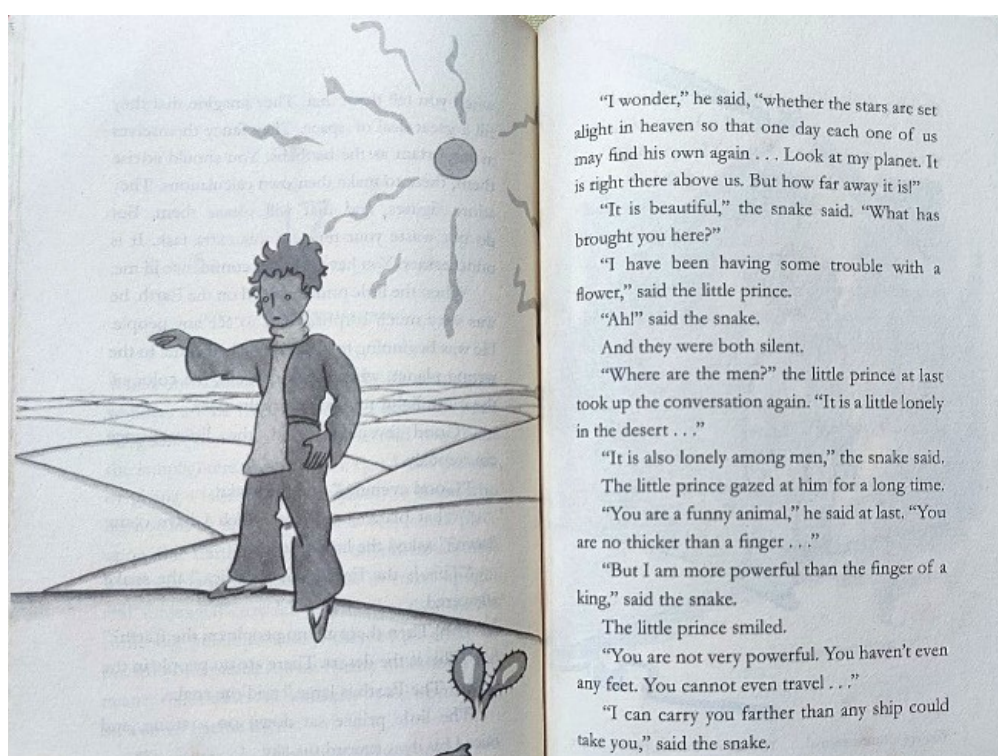


Image: Using visually appealing books to enhance and enrich students' reading experience .

Source: Remya Gopal

In integrating these books with our textbook curriculum, we initiated by introducing the illustrated rendition of Robinson Crusoe's story alongside our exploration of "The Shipwrecked Sailor" with eighth-grade students. Robinson Crusoe, a sailor from York, survives a shipwreck near a deserted island on the coast of America. He spends 28 years alone on the island, facing various challenges. Eventually, he is rescued by a passing ship, ending his solitary life. The Shipwrecked Sailor" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a real-life account of a twenty-year-old young man named Luis Alejandro Velasco. He was washed overboard and stranded in the Caribbean Sea after a

shipwreck. In a raft, he spent ten days without food and water. This story describes how Velasco faced such a dire situation and how he escaped from it. This served as a crucial initial step, seamlessly integrating both the narratives and enhancing the overall learning experience.

To ensure active engagement from all students, including those less inclined to read, we incorporated a captivating short animated video detailing "The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe. This video, sourced from Pebbles Kid Stories, helped to ignite interest and foster a deeper connection with the text. By merging multimedia elements with traditional reading, it aims to create an immersive experience that not only captures students' attention but also sparks their curiosity and lays the foundation for a lasting reading habit (Radu, 2014).

- **Teachers as readers**

As educators, we should set positive examples for our students. We should be willing to read and learn alongside them, demonstrating our own enthusiasm for learning. Connecting our textbook lessons to stories from other books can spark interest in reading. This shows children that their teacher enjoys reading and encourages them to do the same. Naturally, those with an interest in reading are more likely to engage with the material. Similarly, if parents can be encouraged to read, it would encourage reading at home, by the students too.

It took almost a year to receive results [notably, numerous works by Sudha Murthy (Three Thousand Stitches, Grandma's Bag of Stories, How I Taught My Grandmother to Read, etc) were completed by students and many students even joined local libraries for additional reading, students expanded their reading horizons, with many of them becoming confident enough to write reviews in English.] from the selected class, despite it being one of the best classes. Alongside this, ample opportunities for showcasing talents through club activities such as book reviews, newspaper reading, declamation and soliloquy were provided. 'The Reading Day' celebrations were conducted effectively.

There was proper supervision of the teachers at every step for the success of these activities. In my school, Fridays have a long interval from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. Activities were conducted to make the best use of this time. Individual attention should be provided, checking the works already given to them, and preparing them for upcoming programs with the help of my colleagues.

The allocation of time to perform all those activities within the busy schedule of regular school hours was really tough. However, in each class, engaging activities like Just A Minute (JAM) sessions, which fostered a dynamic learning environment, were dedicated for five to ten minutes. Substitution periods were also utilized for this purpose. A very good platform was provided by online education. Besides even in vacation and holidays, activities were provided to keep them engaged.

Initiated Groups & Results of Practical Activities

The journey to promote reading began in 2015, and significant progress was observed, especially from 2016 onwards. The method was initially applied in standard (grade) 8 and later extended to standards 9 and 10. Between eight and twelve students in the selected class of standard 8, who possessed an interest in literature but had not previously had the chance to explore books, started reading books. Others were initially prompted to read but later discovered genuine enjoyment in it. A few students initially preferred watching videos, but with encouragement and exposure, they developed an interest in reading.

Reading was relatively neglected by the other students, whose interests perhaps lay in other areas. This category also comprises students who are unable to read properly. They are interested in watching videos and stories can be told by them in their own mother tongue but struggle to reproduce them in simple English. The help of a special educator in my school was sought to assist with these students. Additionally, their participation in remedial classes, which are conducted to ensure basics in languages, was ensured. This strategy was extended to our Upper Primary section with optimism for its success. However, successful implementation necessitates additional efforts in management.

Even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts were steadfastly maintained. During this period, ample opportunities were provided for both teachers and students to enrich their reading and other literary skills. Students participated in various competitions like Declamation, Dub smash, JAM, Peer Play, Spot Selling, Hot Seat, News Desk, Story Retelling and Soliloquy conducted by District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) under the title English Fest for Enhancing Language Skills (EFFELS) and District Centre for English (DCE) and were positively rewarded.

All these competitions were conducted during the times of COVID-19 and were conducted through online mode. So, both teachers and students had enough time to prepare well. Separate groups for participants were formed, and Google Meet sessions were conducted for each day for their practice, which made them more confident in performing in the competitions. Most of our students qualified for the next level. These activities captured the attention of parents and other officials, leading to a wide range of appreciation. After the COVID-19 pandemic, there were difficulties in properly implementing these activities. However, efforts were made to move forward as much as possible.

Experiences and Learnings

The results of hard work are always rewarding. Last year in 2023, book reviews and participation in declamation activities were voluntarily undertaken by many of my

students. Julian Koepke's speech, from the ninth standard textbook lesson "The Jungle Air crash" by Julian, which appeared in the Malayala Manorama's Padippura on June 13, 2023, was delivered in the school assembly. Afterwards, Julian personified (enacted by a student in the school), visited each class, delivering a poignant message.

In the coming years, the introduction of children to the world of reading through Audio Text is planned. Audio text refers to any form of written content that has been recorded and made available in an audio format, allowing individuals to listen to the text being read aloud. This can include audiobooks, podcasts, voice recordings of written material, and other audio-based resources. The importance of audio text among children lies in its ability to enhance literacy skills, promote language development, and foster a love for reading. Their listening capacity will be enhanced as a result.

Findings

The objectives outlined in beginning of this paper were successfully accomplished. My students' reading skills were enhanced by providing access to diverse reading materials, fostering a reading culture both inside and outside the classroom, through the use of technology, and integrating these practices into the curriculum. The active involvement of teachers and systematic progress monitoring also helped towards this achievement.

Conclusion

Certainly, the experience from this project evidences that its implementation in high school classes not only enhances the reading habits of students but also contributes to the professional development of teachers. This project transformed teachers into avid readers and masters of various language activities, boosting their confidence and making them proficient in multiple skills. It enhanced teachers' versatility, making them better at the various aspects of the teaching profession. Although it may create an additional workload for educators, the long-term benefits of cultivating a reading culture among students make it a worthwhile endeavour.

The journey was challenging, yet incredibly rewarding. With optimism for the future, it is believed that the seeds planted will flourish into a garden of literary wonders for generations to come. More about this journey and the impact it has had on both myself and my students will be shared in the future. In conclusion, I want to encourage all children to make reading a habit. The outcomes of the group work we did, convinced me of the Helen Keller quote "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

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As a child, **Remya Gopal** loved teaching, inspired by her grandmother, a beloved teacher. She thrives by working with energetic, creative minds, which keeps her feeling youthful and energized. She loves reading and encouraging her students to read. She has co-authored articles for Koodu and Yathra. She enjoys nature walks, cooking, gardening, and spending quality time with her children.

Importance of Developing Local Texts to Augment Textbooks

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of developing local texts (booklets) in English language classrooms, emphasizing their advantages over relying solely on textbooks, and also on their significance as home texts for learners. The paper explores innovative strategies for incorporating booklets into language teaching, drawing on classroom experiences to highlight experiences, insights, challenges, and make recommendations for educators.

Introduction

English language classrooms in India have long relied on textbooks as the whole and sole of curricular resources, eminent educator Prof Krishna Kumar bemoans India's 'textbook culture' (Kumar 1988). However, with the growing emphasis on inclusive education and technological advancements, there has been a shift towards developing booklets as supplementary or even primary resources for language learning. This paper delves into the role of developing booklets in English language classrooms, highlighting their advantages over relying solely on traditional textbooks and their significance as home texts for learners. The Ministry of Education,¹ Government of India, issued guidelines for establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in 1995. In this document, the DIETs were encouraged to produce textbooks and learning resources for the enabling greater contextualization of learning materials at a district level. However, this has remained a dream, and our textbooks continue to be produced in centralized mode, at the state level (and even worse at a country level, with many states using NCERT textbooks instead of producing their own). The experiences from this paper re-affirm that curricular policy should promote the decentralized development of curricular resources.

Scope

As a teacher deeply invested in the holistic development of primary school children, I proposed the development and use of local texts in primary classrooms alongside the traditional textbooks. This approach was designed to enrich the way children learn

¹Then the Ministry for Human Resources Development (MHRD)

by harnessing the power of contextual materials, motivational ideas, self-directed learning, cultural awareness, simplified texts aligned with learning objectives. This approach also provided support for enhanced parental engagement.

At the heart of this initiative are motivational materials, carefully curated to ignite curiosity and enthusiasm among young learners. These books are not mere textbooks but companions that inspire children to explore, discover, and learn independently. By fostering a sense of ownership and initiative in their learning journey, these booklets empower children to take charge of their education and develop essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.

Central to my vision is the concept of self-directed learning (NCF 2005 Position Paper on 'Aims of Education'), where children are encouraged to set goals, explore diverse topics, and engage in meaningful learning experiences that align with their interests and aspirations. Through self-directed learning, students become active participants in their education, strengthening their motivation to excel and to achieve their full potential.

One of the key pillars of our approach is cultural awareness and context. The NCF 2005 Position Paper on 'Aims of Education' says "Cultural diversity is one of our greatest gifts. To respect and do justice to others is also to respect and do justice to their respective cultures or communities." We teachers recognize the importance of integrating local culture, heritage, and values into the learning process. Local texts serve as windows to the rich tapestry of our cultural heritage, fostering a deep sense of pride, identity, and empathy among students. By embedding cultural contexts into learning materials, we create meaningful connections that enhance learning outcomes and promote inclusive education.

Our initiative also focuses on creating simplified textbooks that align closely with specific learning objectives. These textbooks are designed to streamline content, eliminate inappropriate complexity, and provide clear guidance on achieving learning outcomes. By aligning textbooks with learning objectives, we ensure that every resource serves a purpose in enhancing students' understanding and mastery of essential concepts and skills.

Furthermore, local texts serve as valuable tools for parents to stay informed and engaged in their child's learning journey. These texts help parents identify what is being taught in the classroom, enabling them to provide targeted support and reinforcement at home. By bridging the gap between school and home learning, local texts empower parents to play a more active and meaningful role in their child's education.

In addition to their role as textbooks, local texts also act as workbooks, providing interactive exercises, activities, and assessments that reinforce learning objectives and promote active engagement. This dual functionality enhances the utility of local

texts as comprehensive learning resources that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences.

Context

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the limitations posed by traditional textbooks in primary education. As an engaged teacher focused on primary school children, it is essential for us to understand and address these challenges.

My school, GHSS Villadam is situated in the urban area of Thrissur district corporation. A majority of students are from families of middle class and lower middle class. Both parents of many children are employed in shops in Thrissur town till night to make a living. Since they are not able to give much care and attention to the education of their children, they rely on home tuitions to support the children, which does not often support meaningful learning. The home tutors mostly focus on rote learning of the topic that the students have been taught in school. This challenge made me think about ways to address the problem. As a part of this process of reflection, I identified several factors that are part of the problem.

- **Lengthy Textbooks:** Traditional textbooks often contain voluminous content, making them overwhelming for young learners. Children at the primary level may struggle to grasp and retain information from lengthy textbooks, leading to a decrease in involvement and consequently, reduced learning outcomes.
- **Lack of Parental Attention:** Many parents today are preoccupied with various responsibilities, leading to their having very limited time and attention for their children's education. This lack of parental involvement can hinder the child's learning process, as parents may be unaware of what is being taught in class and unable to provide adequate support at home.
- **Limited Awareness:** Parents often have limited awareness of the daily curriculum and teaching methodologies used in classrooms. This lack of awareness can create a gap between home and school learning experiences, impacting the child's overall learning journey.
- **Challenges for some learners:** Traditional textbooks may pose significant challenges for some students, who may be lagging behind in language learning. The complexity of language and concepts can be overwhelming, leading to frustration and a decline in confidence. This can further widen the learning gap between them and other students.
- **Limited Personalized Learning:** Traditional textbooks often follow a standardized approach, offering little room for diverse learning experiences tailored to individual student needs and interests. This lack of customization

can hinder student engagement and hinder their ability to reach their full potential.

- **Lack of Student Motivation:** The content and presentation style of traditional textbooks may not always resonate with students, leading to a lack of motivation to read and engage with the material. This can result in surface-level engagement, and a missed opportunity for deeper understanding and development of higher order skills.

In response to these challenges, the emergence of local texts in primary classrooms offers a promising solution. Local texts, which are tailored to the cultural context, language proficiency, and learning pace of students, can address many of the shortcomings associated with traditional textbooks.

Objectives

The study aims to provide insights into the potential benefits, challenges, and implications of incorporating local texts in primary education, and how it could contribute to the advancement of innovative and student-centred teaching practices.

The impact of motivational booklets is assessed in this study. That is the primary objective. I examine how these booklets influence students' motivation, engagement, and self-directed learning behaviours. Self-directed learning allows students to set goals, explore topics independently, and take ownership of their education. Secondly, in this study, the effectiveness of local texts in enhancing students' cultural awareness, understanding of local contexts, and appreciation for cultural diversity is assessed. Fourthly, I assess the degree to which local texts serve as simplified alternatives to traditional textbooks, aiding in better comprehension, retention, and alignment with learning objectives. The study also aims at examining the effectiveness of local texts as workbooks, and investigate parental engagement with the student's learning of the content taught in class, through their interactions with these booklets.

Methodology

This section discusses the methodology used for developing, producing and using local texts in primary classrooms alongside traditional textbooks.

First of all, the students of class 2 and I identified and listed all the learning outcomes (LOs) relevant to the unit or topic being taught. I arranged these LOs in a sequence from simple to complex outcomes, reflecting the progression of learning objectives. We then developed small booklets based on these learning outcomes.

These booklets were created using a single A4 sheet folded into two or four pages and stapled to form a booklet. Each booklet focused on one or more specific learning

outcomes and included a variety of content such as stories, poems, songs, descriptions, conversations, and space for drawing and writing activities.

After each class, the booklets were distributed to all students. These booklets served as home texts that reinforced the learning objectives. Students were asked to read the content and complete the activities provided in the booklet. This encouraged independent learning and reinforced classroom instruction. A variety of content was included in the booklets, such as stories, poems, pictures, and puzzle-like activities. This helped us cater to children at different learning levels and having diverse learning preferences. Parents were informed about the contents of the booklets and their purpose as 'home texts'. After the introduction and processing of each local text, some post-learning activities were also designed for the students, such as book designing, picturization and theatrical enactments. Then, the learners' post-learning activities were posted in the WhatsApp group with the parents of the cohort, which showcased their creative work.

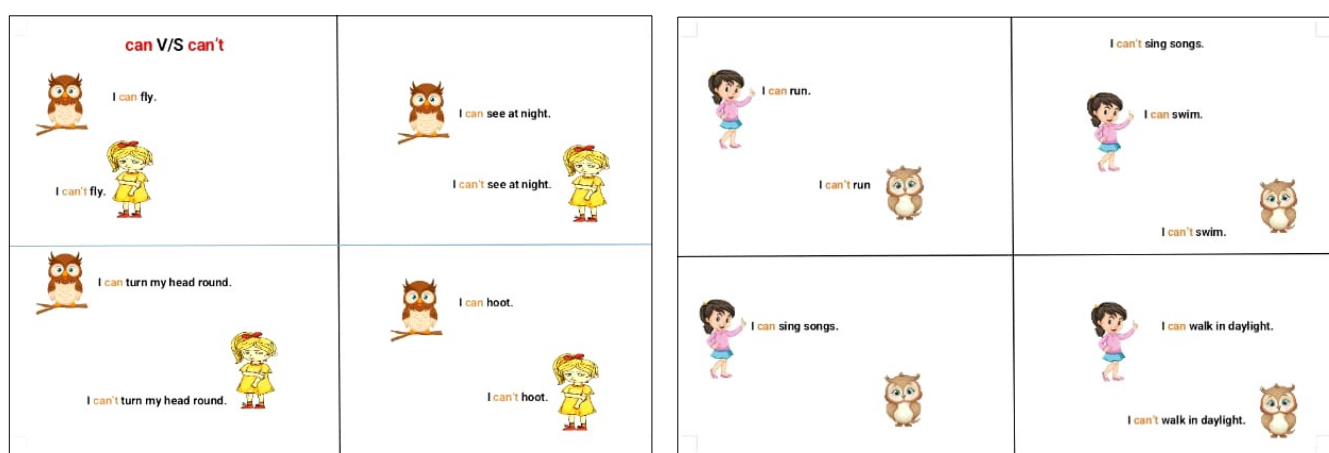


Image: Excerpts from the booklet related to the unit 'Rowly', story of a baby owl, used to teach 'can' and 'can't'. Source: Arathy K R.

In the first booklet I tried to teach the language structure 'can and can't', which is one of the learning outcomes of the particular unit.



Image: Environmental Studies (EVS) elements integrated in the booklet, used to discuss the hot summer season. Source: Arathy K R.

In the second picture, I tried to integrate the Environmental Studies (EVS) elements into the unit. As it is a summer time unit and there are some situations about the hot summer season in the unit, I prepared this booklet. I also introduce the concept of their own family comparing the owl family comparing with a human family.

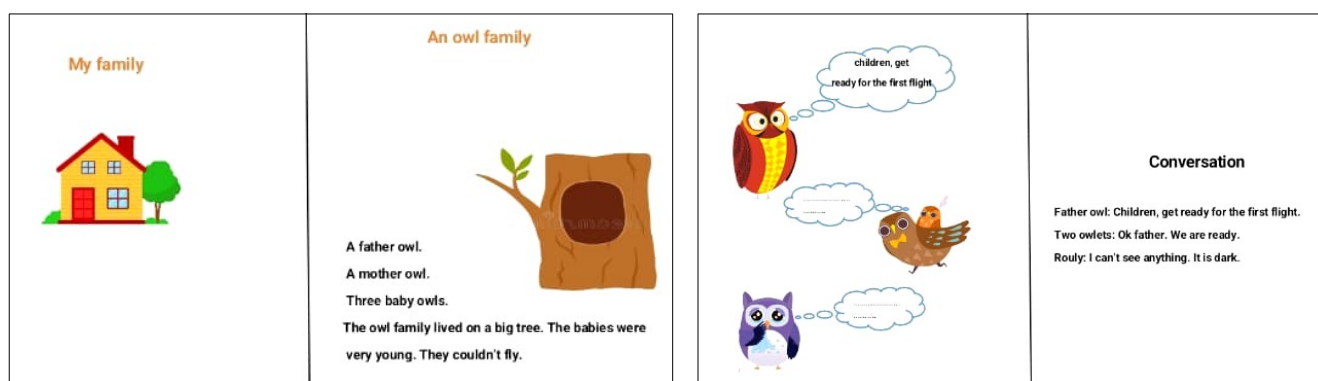


Image: Comparing the owl family with a human family. Source: Arathy K R.

Challenges

Firstly, developing high-quality local texts can be a time-consuming process, involving research, content design, creation, review, and refinement. This challenge is exacerbated by the need to ensure cultural relevance. Balancing efficiency with thoroughness is essential to meet educational objectives within reasonable timeframes. Secondly, many educators may lack the required digital knowledge and resources to effectively integrate local textbooks into their teaching practices.

Thirdly, developing and implementing local texts require financial for content creation, printing, distribution, as well as for the technology infrastructure. Securing funding from government sources, grants, partnerships, or fundraising initiatives is essential to resources sustainably support the production and dissemination of local textbooks. Financial constraints and lack of technical understanding can make it difficult to ensure good quality in the local texts. A fourth challenge is to align local texts with national or regional curriculum standards while incorporating cultural context and diversity poses a significant challenge. It requires collaboration among educators, curriculum specialists, community representatives, and publishing experts to ensure that learning objectives are met without compromising quality or cultural authenticity. Finally, the fact that some parents do not own digital gadgets makes it difficult for them to access local texts produced digitally.

Reflections and outcomes

As a primary teacher of class 2, I gained a thorough understanding of the transformative potential of local texts in enhancing primary education and promoting student-centred, culturally relevant, and effective learning experiences. I

found this process beneficial for my teaching, with the realization that the teacher has higher ownership over the teaching-learning processes when she uses materials that she has created or adapted, compared to using only the textbook that has been produced at a location quite removed from her own.

I also feel that there is a need for a comprehensive teacher education programme covering digital tools, content management systems, interactive learning platforms, and strategies for seamless integration. Providing ongoing support and access to resource libraries can enhance teachers' digital competencies and confidence.

After we started using local texts, I experienced a positive change in children's attitude towards English. There was a visible change in the attitude of parents too towards their children's studies. The simplified local texts made both students and parents feel an attachment to the learning process.

The challenges I faced underscore the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach, involving collaboration among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders. Ongoing teacher professional development, financial support, curriculum alignment, and quality assurance mechanisms are key areas that require continuous attention and refinement. By addressing these challenges proactively, we can harness the full potential of local texts to enrich primary education, promote cultural awareness, and enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

I observed that about 90 percent of the children fruitfully used the customized resources. At the final stages, many began to make their own local texts/ booklets with enthusiasm and interest.

The customized local texts could provide content relevant to their contexts. By incorporating local texts, I could bridge the gap between classroom learning and parental involvement. Parents can better understand and support their child's learning journey when presented with locally relevant materials which they can comprehend. Local texts allow for personalized learning experiences. This customization fostered a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

By integrating local texts alongside traditional textbooks, I created a balanced and enriched learning experience that addressed the unique needs of, along with challenges faced by, primary school children. This approach not only enhanced their academic outcomes but also fostered in them a deeper appreciation for local culture and knowledge. In the coming academic year, I wish to use many materials like stories as a local text to cater to the needs of my students.

Finally, all the materials developed by me are free for other teachers to use and to adapt for their own contexts, as these are licensed as 'Open Educational Resources' (UNESCO, OER) which all can use, revise and share freely. If more and more teachers can access the resources created by their colleagues, adapt and enrich them for their

own use and then release the adaptations also into the common resource pool, it can help create a rich local environment for learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the emergence of local texts in primary classrooms represents a paradigmatic shift towards more inclusive and culturally relevant learning experiences. By embracing motivational booklets, self-directed learning, cultural awareness, simplified aligned with learning objectives, and enhanced parental engagement, we teachers strive to create a dynamic and empowering educational environment where every child can thrive and succeed.

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Percipience Procedure: Fostering Comprehensive Learning through Active Engagement

Holistic Development of LSRW through Activities in Comprehension Passages or Poetic Stanzas

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Introduction

In school education, improving students' language skills is a persistent challenge. Many students find extensive study materials overwhelming, preferring shorter passages that seem more manageable and likely to yield higher marks. This preference highlights the need for new teaching methods that accommodate different learning styles and promote a deeper understanding of language. Traditional teaching methods often focus on passive learning and memorization, which do not effectively develop critical thinking and active engagement. Recently, however, there has been a shift towards more immersive and student-centered approaches, such as the Percipience Procedure.

The Percipience Procedure

The Percipience Procedure is based on the idea of "percipience," which means the ability to see, understand, and gain insight. It can be thought of as a deeper kind of perception that involves awareness and intelligence. This method emphasizes deep comprehension and awareness in learning language. It focuses on learning through perception, ensuring that students thoroughly understand study materials rather than just skim through them. The Percipience Procedure aims to develop comprehensive language skills by encouraging active participation and critical thinking. It can work as an exemplary method in language education, focusing on detailed understanding and deep awareness to master language effectively.

Percipience is an antonym of non-comprehension. It is a sensible approach to learning a foreign language as it expects children to be fully attentive to details and free of stress or distractions. Unless the learner in front of us is able to perceive the complete essence of a learning material or text, the learning can be considered incomplete.

The Percipience Procedure develops Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills through small activities in comprehension passages or poetic stanzas. Unlike traditional methods, it promotes interactive learning, where students engage deeply with texts, analyze them critically, and participate in meaningful discussions. I divided a lesson into parts, telling students to learn to pay close attention to each small part. (This is like the 'divide-and-rule' policy adopted by colonial powers, to conquer.) By breaking down lessons into manageable parts, students had the freedom to take in complex information at their own pace.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore and validate the effectiveness of the Percipience Procedure in enhancing students' language skills through active engagement and comprehensive understanding. It addresses the limitations of traditional teaching methods, which often rely on passive learning and memorization, by introducing a more immersive, student-centered approach. The study aims to demonstrate that the Percipience Procedure can significantly improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills by fostering critical thinking, detailed comprehension, and active participation. By implementing this method with diverse groups of students, it highlights the benefits of interactive learning, collaborative activities, and inclusive education. Additionally, the study aims to show that structured yet flexible assessment strategies, including peer reviews and self-assessments, can reduce anxiety, promote a growth mindset, and lead to better retention and application of knowledge. Overall, the research aspires to provide a robust framework for language education that supports deep learning, student motivation, and long-term academic success.

Implementing the Percipience Procedure

Implementing the Percipience Procedure with 8th and 9th graders at OLFGHS, Mathilakam, Thrissur, Kerala involved several steps: At first different groups were formed to facilitate learning. The class of 60 students were divided into 6 groups. The division was based on abilities and learning preferences, such as academic performance and artistic skills. This division fostered collaboration among students and peer learning. Clear objectives guided the learning process, including creating and answering questions, designing puzzles, playing word games, and encouraging creative expression and discussion. In the beginning, an example of a crossword puzzle from a newspaper was given as an example for practice.

Each group was given tasks that aligned with the objectives, such as crafting questions, solving puzzles, conducting grammatical exercises, analyzing poetry, and writing creative pieces such as short stories or poetry. The students created

crossword puzzles, framed questions and provided clues to help their peers solve them. They discussed their work with other groups to cover all parts of the text.

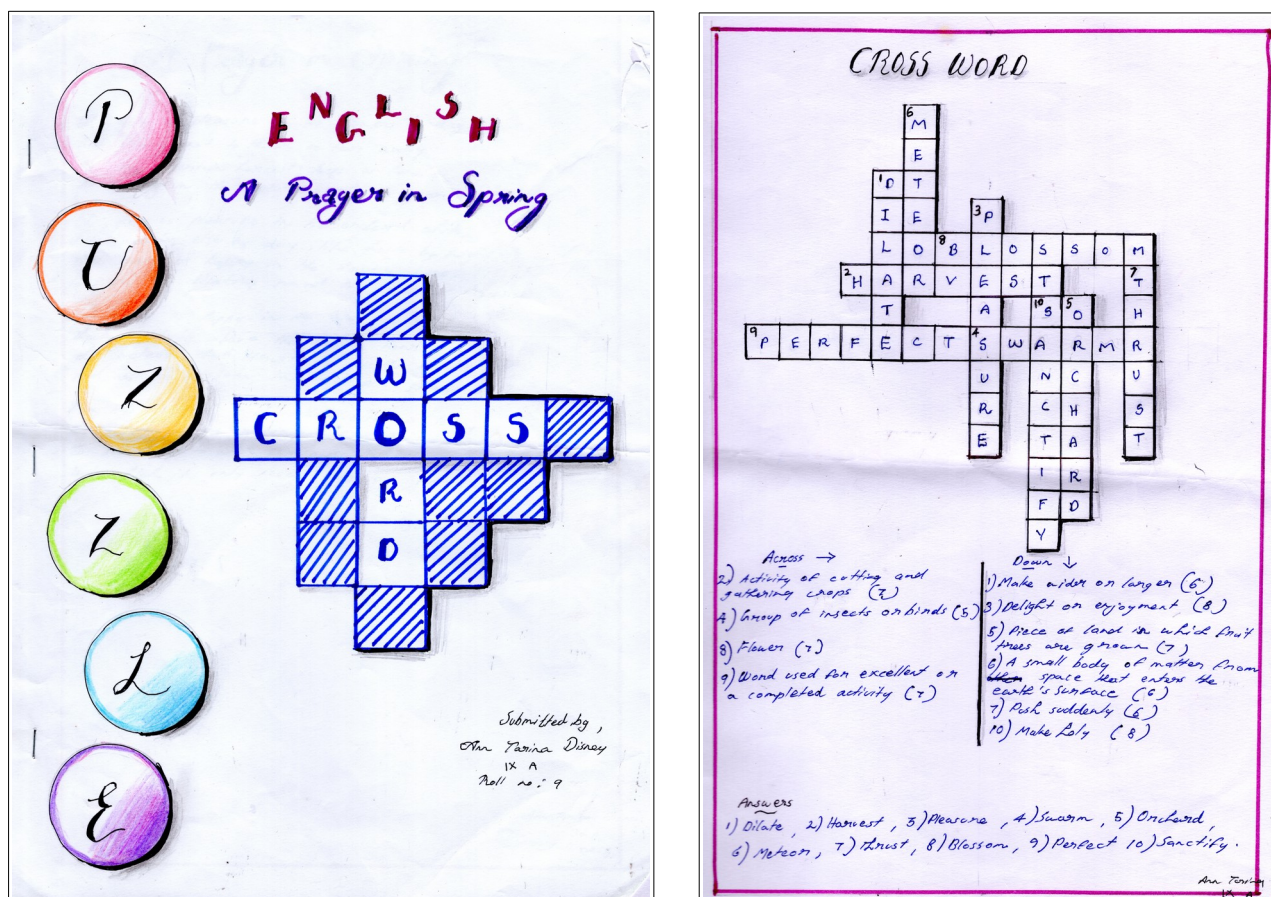


Image: Crossword puzzle created by one of the students. Source: Sajitha Joseph

This activity was designed in such a way that the four skills of language are integrated. It involved **listening** because the students listened to the answers and the comments of their peers. **Speaking** skills had to be exercised while they spoke about their final output and participated in the general discussions. **Reading** came into the picture because the students had to read and make sense of the text in question or the instructions given to them. The students had to engage in **writing** while framing questions and giving clues.

Assessment

Assessments included peer reviews, self-assessment, teacher feedback, and traditional exams. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough evaluation of students' language skills. Peer reviews allowed students to assess each other's work, provide constructive feedback and encourage collaborative learning. This process helped students develop critical thinking skills as they engaged with different perspectives, learning from their peers' strengths and weaknesses. While carrying

out self-assessment, the students evaluated their own work, reflected on their learning journey, and identified areas for improvement. This promoted autonomy and a growth mindset, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning. The teacher gave regular feedback, which involved detailed guidance on assignments and activities. Personalized feedback from teachers helped students reflect on their progress and areas needing improvement, guiding them towards their learning goals.

Traditional exams were also used to measure students' knowledge and skills in a structured format, providing a baseline for comparing individual progress and identifying trends in learning across the class. An individual assignment followed group activities, contributing to continuous evaluation marks. After the group work, team members presented their activity in front of other groups, inviting comments and additions. This collaborative presentation encouraged active participation and peer learning, as students learned to articulate their ideas and receive constructive criticism. For example, after reading a stanza of a poem, group members framed as many questions as possible, delving deeper into the text and developing comprehensive questioning skills. They then analyzed these questions to create short questions suitable for crosswords, requiring critical thinking and synthesis of information.

The next step involved creating clues for the answers, enhancing their ability to convey information succinctly. The students then constructed the crossword by drawing the boxes and adding background artwork, integrating visual creativity with language learning. Each student volunteered to handle a specific area, ensuring that all aspects of the task were covered. This role distribution ensured that each student contributed and learned different facets of the lesson; putting together these individual pieces of learning, the whole class develops a comprehensive understanding of the material. An individual activity was given as homework and presented for assessment by the teacher, helping to track students' progress over time. The quality of self-learning began to emerge strongly among the learners, as they demonstrated an increased ability to work independently and effectively. This was a positive indicator of their growth and development in the learning process.

Findings

Students received this method positively, though reactions varied. Some quickly adapted and thrived, showing significant improvement in their language skills. Others took more time, possibly due to initial resistance to change or varying levels of prior knowledge and intellectual capacities so far developed. The students performing well were enthusiastic about doing the crosswords, while those who took some more time listened to them and learned the techniques of the game. Gradually, they gained self-confidence and participate more actively in the activities.

Each student made his or her maximum number of vocabulary items, framed questions in groups and gave clues to reach the answer. Students showed interest in the game-based learning method, where they were able to summarize and memorize the whole without any help from the teacher. Students showed special interest in framing crossword puzzles with the small passage or stanza provided to them. Children from marginalized backgrounds and those with special needs participated actively, proving the method's effectiveness in inclusion. They also found such activities joyful, and learnt from them. Students showed great involvement in activities that promote comprehension, critical thinking, and language acquisition. They collaborated, shared ideas, and articulated their thoughts.

The students found this method to be an enjoyable way to learn, which led to an increased motivation to engage with the material. This newfound enthusiasm resulted in a desire to undertake more challenges. Both parents and teachers were pleased with this development, as students began studying voluntarily without needing external pressure. This positive outcome encouraged the use of more educational games, which further promoted learning and engagement.

These games also proved to be effective tools for revision. The interactive nature of the activities helped reinforce the material, leading to better retention and a longer-lasting memory capacity. Once students learned something through these games, the information was more likely to stay with them. They were able to recall and apply this knowledge in their future assignments, demonstrating the practical benefits of this learning method.

This process followed the 'assessment for learning' principle, much recommended by educators. Assessment for learning reduces the anxiety that regular summative assessments can create. The collaborative participation in the assessment also reduces the competitive aspect of summative assessment where there is a pressure on students to outperform others (get a higher rank). At the same time, this process provides rich inputs to the teacher to tailor her pedagogies, which would not be possible from merely knowing the marks (or grades) of students.

The structured yet flexible assessment and activity framework adopted in the programme, not only provided a comprehensive evaluation of students but also enhanced their engagement, critical thinking, and independent learning skills. The integration of peer reviews, self-assessment, and creative group activities fostered a holistic educational environment, promoting a thorough understanding and long-lasting retention of knowledge.

The integration of game-based learning methods not only improved immediate language skills but also fostered a deeper and lasting understanding of the material. This approach facilitated a positive learning environment, where students could enjoy their studies and achieve academic success with greater ease.

Challenges

Implementing the Percipience Procedure faced challenges like resistance to change, lack of prior knowledge, spelling deficiencies, time constraints, and varying intellectual levels. These were addressed by giving scaffolding for students with diverse learning needs. Students had a gap in learning due to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of them were from lower middle-class families. The group had learners who had difficulties in speaking or reading English fluently. Many of them could not understand the idea contained in a question/sentence with more than thirteen words. The students had a clear problem comprehending long units of language, such as long sentences and long lessons.

When students started paying attention to smaller and manageable chunks of a lesson, they started learning with involvement and interest. Students who were initially afraid to speak in English started to speak; they sometimes came out with novel ideas while participating in discussions. Their note-taking skills improved and the number of spelling mistakes decreased. Their vocabularies improved. Their essays and short notes showcased the new words in their armours. They started to look up the meanings of the unknown words and phrases. The learners began to use poetic usages and new adjectives that enriched their expression.

Another challenge was that we did not have enough time for group activities. The whole syllabus had to be covered within the prescribed time along with all other co-curricular activities and additional assignments other than teaching. The bureaucratic tasks assigned to the teacher makes it difficult for the teacher to devote sufficient time for planning and presenting classroom activities that are beneficial for the students. The education system can improve only if teachers are allowed to work with the students, present contents and exercises that match the students' levels and ensure their learning. In other words, the teacher needs greater autonomy.

Methods based on Percipience Procedure were implemented by merging two periods at the beginning of the school year. Later the children got so used to these activities that they could complete them within one period. The Children with Special Needs (CWSN) needed more hand-holding for home assignments, which their parents did effectively. The students' knowledge of their home language and lack of knowledge about English basics formed a barrier that sometimes made it difficult to follow a constructive paradigm of teaching and learning.

Lack of interest and lack of resources were also challenges. However, children of the day are extremely interested in games and intensely play with their mobiles. This interest boosted in learning through the percipience procedure which paved the way to the success of attaining the goal of language acquisition.

Outcomes

Classroom exercises based on Percipience Procedure showed improvement in students' comprehension, vocabulary, cognitive abilities, and problem-solving skills. The students themselves, along with their teachers and parents, identified improvements in their LSRW skills. Students who participated in this pedagogical exercise showed better retention, recollection, and intellectual development, and were more inclined to use dictionaries and other reference materials.

This approach is helpful because it makes learning more interactive and engaging - instead of passively receiving information, students actively analyze texts, ask questions, and discuss ideas. This method helps them understand and remember what they learn better, making the learning process more effective and enjoyable.

Different applications of Percipience Procedure stimulated creativity and originality in language use. Parents were deeply involved in their students' learning and kept updating the teachers of their children's improvement even without being asked. Teachers of subjects other than English reported that they often found the students discussing the methods adopted in the English class. They wanted to implement the methods in their classrooms too. Development of higher order thinking skills was a very positive outcome of this approach. The learners began to think about making questions, they learned to give clues. These activities promoted problem-solving, analysis, and synthesis, essential for academic and lifelong success.

As a teacher, I ensured that the novel activities introduced as part of Percipience Procedure went hand-in-hand with the curriculum objectives. As a result, the academic requirements were met while fostering deeper understanding. There was scope for artistic expression. Activities like poetry analysis and creative writing encourage artistic expression, enhancing appreciation for language aesthetics. Tasks related to organizing information improved students' ability to structure information effectively.

Conclusion

The Percipience Procedure represents a shift towards more immersive and student-centered language education. By emphasizing deep understanding and active participation, it enhances LSRW skills and prepares students for real-world language use. This method offers a powerful framework for comprehensive learning through active engagement.

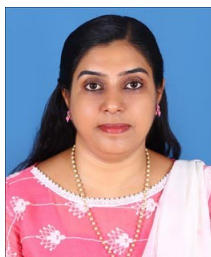
Further research is needed to explore the Percipience Procedure in various educational settings and linguistic contexts. Long-term studies could provide insights into its sustained impact. Developing digital tools could enhance its accessibility and scalability, potentially benefiting more students.

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Fun Learning through Word Games: An Effective Tool for Improving Vocabulary

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Introduction

Communication is something that every human being engages in, and it is also inevitable to the teaching-learning process. But, does it effectively happen in English classrooms? Sometimes, an emphatic 'NO' is the answer. What might be the reasons? Classroom communication is mainly based on oral and written forms. In order to fulfil the basic skills (LSRW) of English, sound vocabulary is a must. Learning a foreign language is somewhat challenging, due to difficulties in building such a vocabulary.

In classrooms, it is generally observed that children have their own creative ideas, but they cannot convey it meaningfully. It seems that children struggle to express their thoughts. As far as primary school children are concerned, lack of sufficient vocabulary is seen to be a crucial problem. Many of them are familiar with the words, but they cannot reproduce it at the appropriate time. Having a strong vocabulary in English may not by itself, have any significant effect on communication. Unless they use it in real life situations, it remains as dead vocabulary. Because of this, the method of learning a word just by memorizing it does not seem to have a practical effect. Since language is a social product, children should learn it without being conscious of the language. For this, I found, language games play a helpful role.

Games help to improve vocabulary retention. It creates a comfortable learning atmosphere. It is a part of constructivist teaching -learning and a kind of discovery learning. Learners get a chance to use vocabulary when they play games. It was Piaget who coined the term 'education games', while researching cognitive development and learning theories (Piaget, 2013). From a linguistic point of view, games are simple illustrations of language usage. (Subon, 2020, and Lubis, 2020).

Objectives

My first objective was to use games to make upper primary children (5th to 7th standard) get rid of their shyness and start use language naturally and without self-consciousness. Playing games builds team spirit and children become confident enough to express their feelings without any inhibition.

The main objective is to enhance the vocabulary of children. They should develop a deep sense of familiarity with their words so that they can use it freely and

appropriately. Before completing the primary section, children should acquire a minimum level of vocabulary. Games will help them to use vocabulary unconsciously.

If we choose the games wisely, we can also make them familiar with more English phrases that will contribute to their lexical knowledge. For that we have to be very conscious about the reading materials that we are providing. It should cater to the needs of children. If we provide more reading materials, children will become familiar with phrases in English.

As an English teacher, I try to create in the children an interest in English. But, in this age of social media, it is not an easy task as all are surrounded by sensory stimuli that provide information and entertainment. If a teacher can create an interest among children, they will find their own ways to improve their language. In primary classes, we can use games as an entry in to the world of words for children, which in turn help them to cultivate a reading habit.

Another important aim was to enable children to convey their inner thoughts, moving from the passive roles of listening and reading to the active roles of writing and speaking. Games would motivate them to express their feelings and thoughts in English either through speaking or writing.

Process of playing the games

The games I had adopted for children's language learning are discussed below, along with my suggestions for teachers who may want to implement them in their classes. The suggestions I offer below are from my own observations. I worked with children of upper primary classes (5th to 7th standard).

Duration: One Year

Materials used: Reading cards, Dictionary, Note books, Teacher's vocabulary book, Chart.

Level 1

◦ Step 1

Children are asked to sit in different groups, which have been formed through discussion among the teacher and the students. For each group, the teacher gives paper strips, having a small write-up with some words underlined. For the first level these words can be "Sight Words." They are asked to read and try to make sense of the write-up. They read these underlined new words and try to understand the meaning of it from the context. (Reading cards appropriate to the children's levels can also be used here).

After that, the children go on to find out the real meaning of the word with the help of a dictionary. It should be kept in mind that the write-ups include only age- and level-appropriate words.

Since sight words are very familiar at least for some children, they easily identify the meaning of the underlined word. This helps improve their confidence and of course they will show greater interest in playing more language games in the future.

- **Step 2**

After the children discuss in their groups, the first group asks the meaning of any word to the second group. According to the need, they also provide the context by reading the whole sentence. If the second group clearly identifies the meaning, they get one point. Next, the second group asks the meaning of a word to the third group. Likewise, the game progresses. The group that gets the highest score becomes the winner.

It would be good to keep in mind that the words underlined that are given to different groups are roughly of the same difficulty level. Otherwise, the groups will have a big difference in their score levels.

Game: FIND ME IF YOU CAN

This is an individual game. The teacher utters any of these sight words from the textbook and asks the children to find out it. The child who finds out the word first will be the winner. The game is aimed at creating an interest among primary school children so that they will demand for more such games. Creating such demand is a necessary first step for enhancing receptiveness. This game contributes a lot for the participation of those students who may be inhibited about participating in English language activities.

Level 2

- **Step 1**

After children have learned a minimum number of sight words, we move to the second level. At this time also paper strips are circulated among children, again with some underlined words. Here the selection of words should be based on Active Vocabulary (frequently used words). We also have some Passive Vocabulary, consisting of words we know, but do not use much. The first group will ask a question to the second group to find out the synonym of a word or simply the meaning of it in English. Children should guess the meaning from the context. If the situation demands it, they can also use a dictionary. This again continues with the next group. The group that could find out maximum number of meanings will be the winner.

A word can be a part of active or passive vocabulary based on its usage. So, it should be kept in mind that the vocabulary that teacher tries to familiarise should take according to its usage in day to day life. So active vocabulary will be a wise initial choice.

This process helps to teach vocabulary for the student's daily life. Instead of writing some words on blackboard and ask children to memorise it, teachers can make use of reading materials that includes this kind of vocabulary.

- **Step 2**

The teacher makes use of the text book to identify similar active vocabulary. The teacher will tell the meaning or synonym and ask children to find out the word from text book. The child who gets more words will be the winner.

The best part of this game is that it connects children to the text book. The competition gives them an incentive to read the text book. It is 'active reading' because they have to pay attention to the meaning.

Game: JUMBLED WORDS

The teacher can make use of games as an evaluating tool also. In this game teacher writes a familiar word in blackboard in a jumbled order and asks children to identify the word. The children who are able to answer are rewarded with a word of appreciation.

Making mistakes is a part of learning. But the method we adopt for correcting them matters a lot, as it can affect the children's emotional state and their attitudes towards learning and the class. I try to lead children to the correct answers and thus correct themselves. Here children are learning by doing. In standard five this game has been found to be very effective in making children participate actively in the learning process.

Here teacher should take extra care for supervision. In some cases, there might be a chance for malpractice. Always make sure that children are true to themselves.

Level 3

- **Step 1**

Reading cards are circulated among children. In the given sentences the phrasal verbs and idioms are underlined. Children are asked to guess their meanings from the context itself. Chance is given to different groups to identify the meaning.

This is actually an extension of a textbook activity from standard seven. For instance, the syllabus of standard seven expects children to learn phrasal verbs and idioms.

Playing games can support this activity, games need not be distinct from syllabus related tasks. The teacher should make every effort to link the two.

- **Step 2**

The teacher reads or shows printed material from some source other than the textbook and asks children to arrive at the meaning. At this level, children are expected to read and comprehend any piece of text appropriate to their level.

Reading with comprehension indicates a higher level of learning. At this level the teacher should conduct an evaluation to understand the level of children. The teacher can be flexible regarding which game is to be played and its duration because there is no fixed set of rules for learning a foreign language.

Game: ALPHABET GAME

At the upper primary level children are expected to have a basic vocabulary and can easily play this game. The teacher begins with a word. Then a child would come up with another word starting with the last letter of the first word, then another child would produce a word that starts with the last letter of the previous child's word and so on. This can be played both individually and in groups.

The teacher can use this game to re-energize the children when they look bored or tired in class. This game is also a free time learning activity, which children voluntarily play outside class.

Level 4

- **Step 1**

In the fourth level, children make use of words to frame sentences. This can be given as a group work. The first group supplies a word and the second group creates a sentence with it. The group that comes up with a sentence will be rewarded with a word of appreciation.

At this level the teacher helps children correct their sentence structures. This practical way of 'editing' will be much useful in the examinations as well.

- **Step 2**

Here the teacher simply gives any word to the children asking them to form sentences using the given word. Children are then asked to read out the sentences they formed. This game would help children see connections between words and sentences. In the long run, this would help children build their speaking and writing skills.

Game: JUST A MINUTE (JAM)

In this game, the teacher would ask a child to come forward and speak about a topic for one minute without break or pauses. While playing this game, the teacher should give necessary support to the child and encourage them to speak. This is a game intended to improve children's speaking skills, after a basic vocabulary is built. Children of upper primary are equipped with the basic vocabulary necessary to play this game.

Children find JAM a very interesting and effective game that poses only a minor challenge. JAM demands only 'one minute' to speak so that even a slow or diffident learner would try to speak out anything before the class. This will help them gain the confidence to speak before an audience. This will also sow the seed for helping them participate in debates and group discussions in the future.

Teachers can make use of any piece of work or reading cards for all these activities. As these games are done in groups, children actively participate in them. As a result of all these, they will unknowingly build up a habit of reading English and expressing their ideas in English.

Findings

Games can be used both as a teaching tool and as an evaluating tool. It was observed that games enabled the teachers to develop a good rapport with children and they developed a strong interest in learning English. I share some of my experiences below.

Starting with 'sight words' is highly recommended since even those children with poor vocabulary can identify the words in the first game. Playing with 'Jumbled words' creates a competitive spirit among children. It moved to an extent where they started demanding for games as soon as the teacher entered the classroom. 'Alphabet Game' became a beloved free time activity for children. Children's knowledge of words improved with minimum effort and in some classes, children even started group discussions and debates on their own. They gradually progressed to showing greater interest in reading cards. From reading cards, they moved on to the habit of reading English books.

The cultivation of reading habit would support children's improvement in English and overall intellectual growth. Although language games seem very simple, they gradually transform a child's ability to think and communicate, because language is the vehicle for thought. Greater the language skill, greater is the ability to think. My experience of teaching English through language games taught me that every great action starts with a single step. As Malala Yousafzai said, 'one child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.'

Challenges

Conducting language games in primary classrooms is slightly risky since it may affect the discipline in the classrooms. A teacher can manage this risk by having a good control of the classroom. When children lose their inhibition and participate with great energy, other classes may be disturbed. Teachers should be mindful of that while engaging the children in language games.

The next thing is about the choice of games. It is not necessary that the first game or reading material that we select suits our students. As per the response from the class, teacher can change any game or reading material. We have many language games available. Challenges may arise when moving through the strategies. A good teacher should be very patient. Overcoming challenges is an important part of any project. Only a teacher knows the pace of her class. So, the success of games depends on the competence and the attitude of a teacher.

Another important aspect is the risk that the profession demands. Language games are not a part of syllabus. Since teachers are required to cover the syllabus, this can lead to time crunch for playing word games. However, the teacher should not see the textbook and language games in separate compartments. The teacher should work hard to dovetail the two processes.

In case of grouping students also the teacher should take extra care. It should be a heterogeneous group. Since peer learning is very important in learning process, the children should be able to freely interact with each other. Even very inactive members of the group should feel as a part of their group. Here the teacher contributes to the team spirit that in turn results for the individual growth of children.

Conclusion

I think of the English classroom as a window to the world. Teaching from the textbooks is only one part of it. Language games, in my experience, have been an effective method in English classrooms. It is mainly because of the 'fun' element in learning. Memorisation is not an effective tool for language learning. They should learn language relatively effortlessly, as a part of their normal communication, as they will see language as relevant to their work. The group aspect of the work makes it somewhat stress-free for the students. It is helpful even for students who may not engage with the learning processes as others.

Teachers have to be very careful while selecting the games. Time-consuming games should be avoided. It is important to remember that different children are inspired by different games. The teacher should make sure that the interest in language learning that you have created remains alive over the years. The long-term effect of this will be that the learner develops a habit of reading.

Once they have cultivated the habit of reading, they would want to read any piece of writing they come across. This will automatically improve their vocabulary. They will remain curious and may move on to writing, with the teacher's encouragement.

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Exploring the Efficacy of Mediation Strategies on ESL Classroom Dynamics: A Research Study

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Introduction

This research paper investigates the effectiveness of mediation techniques in improving the dynamics of classrooms, where English is taught as a second language (ESL). In recent years, the role of mediation in language learning has garnered increased attention as educators seek innovative approaches to engage students and facilitate language acquisition. This study aims to contribute to explore the impact of mediation strategies on ESL classroom dynamics, focusing on important skills of communication, critical thinking and creativity.

We all have to take information, understand it, and then explain it to others. Although it may be second nature to many, it takes a combination of several skills to accomplish this. Other common examples that require these skills include explaining a timetable to a new class or just passing on the latest gossip! Taking information, summarizing it, and passing it on is an example of what linguists call mediation, and it is a key skill for language learners at all levels. This research paper investigates the effectiveness of mediation techniques in improving the learning of ESL.

Objectives

The main objective of this action research is to investigate the role of mediation through exploring the theoretical foundations of mediation in the ESL classroom, examining its definition, scope, and significance in facilitating language learning and communication. Furthermore, this paper intends to examine mediation techniques by identifying and analyzing various mediation techniques that are employed by ESL teachers. This also aims at exploring mediator roles and strategies by investigating the roles and strategies of teachers and peers as mediators in facilitating language mediation, examining their effectiveness in promoting linguistic and communicative competence among ESL learners.

Over and above that the research proposes to improve language proficiency by assessing how mediation strategies help students improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in English. It also evaluates whether mediation strategies increase student participation and engagement in the teaching-learning

process. This study as well examines the possibility of reducing anxiety related to language learning, and boosting student confidence through mediation. It also attempts to determine how mediation strategies can address the diverse needs of students with varying levels of English proficiency. How these strategies promote critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities in students is intended to be assessed.

Literature Review

According to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) learners engage in mediation when they act “as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning.” It describes the actions of those who help when, for some reason, there is a communication gap which needs to be filled, and the same (or similar) content is conveyed using different language (not necessarily just one particular language), in order to bridge that gap.

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is an international standard that is used not in Europe only but in other nations as well. Its objective is to assess and show how learners are progressing in learning any language, not only English. Learners can be placed according to their proficiency in a given language. The learners just beginning their language learning journey are categorized as Pre-A1 and the learners with basic proficiency are placed in groups A1 and A2. The learners with intermediate proficiency are classified in B1 and B2 and the ones who are highly proficient are in C1 and C2. This system helps learners see their progression, rather than simply say that they ‘can’ or ‘cannot’ speak a language. The focus is on the positive, the can-do part of the learners.

Language activities and the traditional LSRW skills as well as the strategies to support these language activities may be classified into Reception, Production, Interaction and Mediation according to CEFR. Reception include reading, listening or watching and speaking or writing can be listed under Production. Interaction consists of social and cognitive processes and finally mediation which is often about taking the same content and rephrasing it to suit a different context. This paper focuses on mediation. The CEFR scales of Mediation are mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediating communication.

When someone is able to bring people from different sociocultural backgrounds together in an act of communication, they are said to be involved in mediating communication. Tasks can be mediated when learners decide to work together collaboratively to achieve a goal. The teaching of real-life communication skills naturally includes mediation skills. Teachers can incorporate mediation skills into practical classroom activities.

Methodology

The action research was conducted at the Government National Boys High School, Kodakara, which serves a student population from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, though predominantly from the poorer sections of society. The ninth grade Malayalam medium section comprised a heterogeneous group of 37 learners, with English proficiency levels ranging from Pre-A1 to C2 according to CEFR grading. Unfortunately, academic performance was a low priority for many parents. Students, except those at C1 and C2 levels, generally had reduced engagement in the classroom, leading to disappointing performance in the end-term exams.

Numerous strategies to improve academic performance met with little success. Consequently, the school's Staff Resource Group met to address the issue. After extensive brainstorming and discussions, they decided to conduct a tailored assessment. This assessment tool included questions aimed at testing English proficiencies. Based on the assessment results, learners were grouped according to their proficiency levels.

Proficiency Level	No. of Learners
Pre – A1	10
A1 & A2	12
B1 & B2	13
C1& C2	2

Table: Proficiency levels of the student group based on results from the tailored assessment. Source: Sandhya P U

It was noticed that the learners were not fully engaged in classroom activities, and traditional pedagogies had not been effective. Traditional methods, which often rely heavily on lecture-based instruction and rote memorization, seemed to fail in engaging students' interest, and motivating them to actively participate in their own learning process. This lack of engagement was evident from their passive participation, low enthusiasm, and minimal interaction during lessons.

To address this issue, a set of innovative activities was designed to cater to learners at different proficiency levels. The design and implementation of these activities was a part of the research, aimed at studying how mediation strategies could replace or complement traditional methods. These activities were based on the story, "The Race," written by Nisha Punjabi, from the English course book. The story was chosen for its engaging content and potential to be adapted into various interactive and inclusive learning activities.

Activities for Pre-A1 Learners

- **Letter spots:** An activity called "Letter Spots" was introduced after teaching the passage, making students familiar with the context and vocabulary. Students were given a list of scrambled words taken from the passage. Students worked individually or in pairs to unscramble the letters and find the correct words.
 - They were encouraged to refer to the passage if needed, promoting active engagement with the text. After completing the task, a class discussion was held where students shared their answers.
 - The learners found this activity interesting and engaging. This activity proved to be successful to help students learn and reinforce key vocabulary from the passage and to improve spelling and word recognition. Learning was made more interactive and fun, thereby increasing student participation. The confidence of the students was strengthened with the sense of achievement. One notable response came from a student who expressed that it was the first time he felt truly involved in a classroom activity. This feedback underscored the effectiveness of the "Letter Spots" activity in creating an inclusive learning environment by transforming a passive learner into an active participant.

Activities for A1 & A2 Learners

- **From Words and Phrases to sentences:** The learners in this group demonstrated the ability to read individual words and, with some difficulty, could also read sentences. However, they struggled with framing grammatically correct sentences. This challenge is common among learners who are developing their language skills.
- **Sentence building with provided words:** To directly address the learners' difficulties, a guided activity was created to frame sentences using the words provided, as follows.
 - *Tarun, student, he, mediocre, good at, ambition, fastest runner*
 - Additional words: *his, running, to be*
 - They were asked to construct simple sentences. They framed
 - *"Tarun is a student."*
 - *"He is good at running."*
 - *His ambition is fastest runner."*

Upon reviewing these sentences, some grammatical errors were identified. To help the students correct these errors, additional words are provided: his, running, and to be. With these new words and the support of their teacher, the learners attempt to improve their sentences. Encouraging a positive and supportive learning environment enhanced their confidence and skills in sentence construction.

Activities for B1 & B2 Learners

B1 and B2 level learners were somewhat hyperactive and it was crucial to design activities that were engaging, interactive and catered to their need for movement and stimulation. Activities that could help address their hyperactivity, while enhancing their language skills were designed.

- **Mime:** They were provided the scene of the story 'The Race' where Tarun falls thrice and runs again and finishes the race to be enacted through mime, thereby improving their comprehension, non-verbal communication skills, and engagement. They were very eager to enact the mime. This activity was both educational and enjoyable, making it an excellent choice for hyperactive learners.
- **Role Play:** An activity that gave scope for language generation was planned for them. The students took on different roles of Tarun and Father / Mother in a conversation. This encouraged students to mediate and negotiate language use based on the roles that they were playing. Though they failed to use complete sentences or sentences with appropriate structure, they attempted to speak in fragments.
- **Retelling a Story:** Through this activity the learners attempted to retell the story "The Race" in their own words. It was presented as a chain story where all the learners belonging to this group participated. The presentation increased the confidence level of the learners, though the presentation lacked proper sequencing or appropriate tense forms. Students could anyways convey the story. This activity encouraged creative language and critical thinking.
- **Storytelling and Story Interpretation:** Engaged children in activities of mediation relating to stories. Examples include retelling stories in their own words or interpreting the meanings behind them.

By integrating these activities into language learning, students were encouraged to use their creativity and critical thinking skills in new and dynamic ways. This method not only made learning engaging and fun, but also deepened their understanding of storytelling, expression, and interpretation.

Activities for C1 & C2 Learners

These levels represent high proficiency in the language, where learners can use the language effectively and flexibly in various contexts. To effectively support C1 and C2 learners, activities that are challenging, intellectually stimulating and relevant to their interests are designed.

- **Discussions:** A thought-provoking discussion topic 'Do you agree with Tarun's father who gives importance to studies only?' was given. The students worked in pairs and each pair was given an opportunity to present arguments and opinions. Students were given time to think and organize their thoughts. The use of relevant examples and evidence to strengthen their arguments was encouraged.
- **Video Analysis:** A video of 'Famous Failures' was shown and they were asked to convey the message they had assimilated from the video. After watching the video, a brief class discussion was facilitated to gather initial thoughts and reactions. Questions such as "What did you find most surprising?" or "Which story inspired with you the most?" were asked. Students worked in pairs to discuss their interpretations of the video's message. Each pair presented their ideas in simple English, focusing on the main message they assimilated from the video. They are encouraged to use their own words and relate the message to their personal experiences or to broader concepts.

Both activities were designed to challenge C1 and C2 learners. Here students develop a range of skills, including critical thinking, effective communication, and the ability to interpret and express complex ideas.

Outcomes

The Learners who earlier never participated in the teaching-learning process are given opportunities to do so, in small realistic ways. When the learners go through different steps of the activities, even passive listeners can engage themselves in the learning process. Apart from gaining increased proficiency in language; skills like critical thinking, problem solving and creativity are implicitly cultivated in them.

Students who already have good communication skills are given more challenging activities to facilitate further language development in them. The presentations made by these students by themselves constituted a mediation of text, concepts and communication for their classmates.

Suggestions and recommendations

Designing activities that catered to the diverse needs of learners was highly time-consuming and hence difficult to implement. There was a lack of systematic follow-up

activities designed to advance learners to the next level of proficiency, hindering sustained language development.

It is suggested to the curriculum revision committees to review the study and its findings, and include activities that cater to learners with varying levels of proficiency. Additionally, reducing the number of units in the curriculum could provide more opportunities for practical language use, thereby enhancing learners' proficiency levels.

Conclusion

The research study on the efficacy of mediation techniques in enhancing ESL classroom dynamics yielded significant insights. The findings suggest that mediation techniques, when effectively implemented, can profoundly impact ESL classrooms by fostering a more engaging, supportive, and productive learning environment. Overall, the research indicates that mediation techniques are a valuable tool in the ESL classroom. They not only improve the immediate classroom dynamics but also contribute to long-term language development and student success. Future research could explore the integration of mediation techniques with other pedagogical approaches to further enhance their efficacy and adaptability in various ESL learning contexts.

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Enhancing English Oral Proficiency of Secondary School Learners in Rural Kerala, Enhancing Global Citizenship Possibilities

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Abstract

Secondary School students of Kerala lack confidence in speaking effectively in the English language. The purpose of this research paper is to examine the impediments encountered by them as they try hard to cultivate their oral proficiency in English language, thereby enhancing possibilities for their global connectivity and fostering their roles as global citizens. In the educational context, it is observed that learners may demonstrate adeptness in written English yet face challenges in effectively and eloquently articulating their thoughts and ideas in English. This article explains the different strategies that can be implemented for augmenting the oral proficiencies of secondary level students naturally.

Keywords: secondary school students, oral proficiency, global connectivity.

Introduction

I did my secondary schooling in Kendriya Vidyalaya in Cochin and it is there that I developed a love for English language. In that school, where students from other states also studied, we didn't have any language in common other than English with which we could communicate with each other and with our teachers. Thus, communicating in English started becoming an effortless process for me.

But after my post-graduation and B. Ed, I got a job in a government-aided school in a village named Chittattukara in Thrissur, Kerala in 2005 and I started realising that the learners in that school were not at all exposed to English language. At first whatever I said to them in English was incomprehensible to them. When I talked to them, they did not respond, and even when I scolded them, they did not react. They did not understand what I taught them. Even my colleagues, whose children were studying in the same school started complaining that their children were failing to understand my teaching as they were not getting word-to-word translations in their mother tongue. I too started becoming hesitant about the method that I had been using to make them acquire English language. But I still believed that learners can learn a language only if we expose them to it.

With this thought in mind, I started observing my learners to try and find out the blocks that impeded them in the process of English language acquisition. After many interactions with both teachers and students facing a similar challenge, I identified the major impediments faced by secondary students across Kerala studying in government/government - aided schools especially in rural areas. Yet, for reaching my desired outcome of making students really comfortable with English, I realised 'I have miles to go before I sleep' (as Robert Frost put it).

The Context of my Action Research

In my view, English, a foreign language is a hard nut to crack for most Indian students. In spite of learning English from a very early stage, learners still face problems in comprehending the language as well as communicating effectively and eloquently in it. As Dr. Abida Farooqui notes, "the words 'teaching' and 'learning' any language are inappropriate because language cannot be taught or learnt, but can only be acquired" (Farooqui, 2015). She notes that this acquisition of language is a gradual, incremental process, which is easy and interesting "once the ball is set in motion." This statement definitely throws some light on the question 'Why do our secondary school learners fail to acquire English language skills even after being exposed to English from their primary classes?'

It is a fact that, in most cases, teachers are trying to 'enforce' language through 'teaching', on the learners, rather than providing them opportunities to acquire language through a natural process. Since English is not our mother tongue, a completely natural process of learning may not be possible. But it would be possible to create an English-speaking environment in the classrooms and at school in general. Parents too can foster the love for learning English at home by providing ample opportunities.

The main issue that most secondary school students of government/government-aided schools in rural areas of Kerala had with the English Language Lab (ELL) software application provided by the Kerala education department is that they function in a non-English speaking environment and hence spoken English sounds unfamiliar to them as they reach secondary level. Most of the children come from socially and economically backward sections of society, and did not seem to have long-term goals. They failed to see themselves in a larger world space. Since the purpose of every language is to enable effective communication, my focus was on building the necessary skills for that.

For secondary school learners, a high-level competence in English can help them participate in discussions that explore different perspectives, beliefs, and customs. In today's rapidly evolving globalized world, where collaboration, interconnectedness, and cultural understanding are paramount, enhancing the oral proficiency of our learners is crucial as it empowers them to effectively communicate and connect with

the world around them, and widen that world in the process. In this project, I attempt to formulate strategies aimed at accommodating the needs of learners to augment their oral proficiency, thereby, facilitating their access to global opportunities. The challenges and limitations while going through the process are discussed.

Objectives

The goal of my programme was to enhance the spoken English proficiency of secondary school learners in rural Kerala, empowering them to connect globally and become global citizens. Improving their English oral proficiency was aimed to boost their self-confidence, opening them up to job opportunities across the world. This increased proficiency would reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings or difficulties due to language barriers. This would result in a better lifestyle for themselves and their families.

- **The Possibilities of English Language**

English, with its global reach and versatility, presents boundless opportunities for individuals across the world. From enhancing career prospects to fostering cross-cultural understanding, English proficiency offers a myriad of advantages. It serves as a bridge connecting people from diverse backgrounds, facilitating communication and collaboration on a global scale. Moreover, access to English literature, media, and online resources empowers individuals to expand their knowledge and perspectives. English offers great possibilities of educational opportunities and professional growth.

Mastery of spoken English serves as a catalyst for empowerment among students, instilling within them a newfound confidence in their ability to communicate. This proficiency unlocks doors to avenues of self-expression, enabling individuals to articulate their thoughts and ideas with clarity and precision. When it comes to higher education, it opens doors to prestigious institutions and scholarships, enabling learners to pursue their academic aspirations regardless of geographical boundaries.

- **Challenges for English Education**

English education in government and government-aided schools in Kerala faces several challenges. One of the primary issues is the lack of adequately trained teachers proficient in English, which hampers effective instruction. A shortage of teachers qualified in English language teaching, particularly in primary and secondary classes, hinders proper language acquisition from an early stage. This affects students' proficiency as they progress to higher classes. Despite Kerala's high literacy rate, there is a significant lagging behind in English language education in many schools. Resource constraints are another challenge, as many schools lack

essential learning materials, including English books other than textbooks, digital resources, and language labs.

In classrooms with a large number of students, providing personal attention and getting adequate feedback becomes extremely difficult, making it challenging to assess each student's oral proficiency effectively. Socio-economic disparities also play a role, as students from deprived backgrounds do not receive the necessary support at home to reinforce their English skills. Their circumstances, and any comparisons made with others, can demotivate learners and reduce their interest in learning English, especially if they do not see immediate practical benefits. Additionally, although the curriculum and teaching methodologies in these schools have changed much over the years, students are burdened by extensive syllabus and the disproportionate attention given to academic performance in exams.

Because of these factors, the students do not improve much in terms of practical language use and interactive learning. The extensive syllabus in secondary classes leaves little room for additional activities that enhance language skills. Teachers struggle to balance the demands of the syllabus with the need to improve students' proficiency in speaking skills. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy interventions, increased investment in teacher training, and the implementation of innovative teaching practices.

Approaches for Enhancing Oral Proficiency

There have been instances in my teaching career when I became proud of the effort, I had put in to let my learners realise the significance of learning English. A former student of mine, currently a Higher Secondary teacher, told me that he still remembers how I had taught him and his friends the pronunciations of many English words. Some of my former students have opted English Language and Literature for their higher studies. Another former student, who was generally inattentive in class, told me that he regrets not being attentive enough in my classes. Now he is forced to attend spoken English classes as he is looking for employment abroad.

I also recall a third former student who contacted me and asked me to teach him again the basics of English as he was working in an event management firm abroad and could not comprehend what his manager was asking him to do. These examples show the global importance of English when it comes to employment and opportunities.

Enhancing oral proficiency in the classroom involves creating an environment where students feel comfortable speaking and are given ample opportunities to practice their speaking skills. Therefore, despite all the challenges faced while trying to enhance the oral proficiency of secondary learners, I decided to communicate with

them in English, their target language. This was an opportunity they would not get anywhere else.

- **Vocabulary**

I briefly describe my method here. Initially, I divided my class into different groups and selected a group leader for each, choosing those with a passion for the language. Then I made them sit together in their groups and introduced a new word each day to enrich their active vocabulary. Students were encouraged to write the newly learnt words in a notebook and name it as 'My English World' and this handbook served as a valuable resource for them in the future. All instructions in class were given in English to enable them become accustomed to the language.

In addition to teaching new vocabulary and conversing in English, I also made them listen to simple stories using either mobile phones or other ICT devices. I exposed them to stories narrated by both native speakers and non-native speakers of English. I asked them to narrate stories and share their experiences when they went for an excursion or a movie. Different topics were assigned to different groups and every Friday, one group had to present the topic in a unique way. Discussions about the textual lessons were conducted during class to promote interactive learning among the children. Various scenarios were created to provide the learners with opportunities to use the language in practical contexts.

- **Recognition and Praise**

Encouraging and praising students for their efforts to speak, regardless of their proficiency level, created a supportive and motivating classroom environment. When students receive positive reinforcement, they are more likely to participate actively and take risks in using the language. Simple acknowledgments, such as a smile, nod, or verbal praise like "Great job!" or "I appreciate your effort!" can significantly boost their confidence. Additionally, positive reinforcement helps reduce anxiety and fear of making mistakes, which are common barriers to language learning. Therefore, by celebrating small successes and progress, I tried to foster a growth mindset, encouraging students to continue improving their oral proficiency.

- **Personal Goals**

Helping students set personal goals for their oral proficiency is another effective strategy. When students have specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, they are more focused and motivated to practice speaking. For instance, a student might set a goal to speak for two minutes on a specific topic without using a script. Regular tracking of their progress towards these goals helps students stay motivated and see their improvement over time. This process not only enhances their speaking skills but also teaches valuable life skills such as hard work, self-discipline and perseverance. Therefore, three grades A, B and C which correspond to excellent, good and satisfactory are given to the students according to

their oral proficiency. By combining positive reinforcement and goal setting, teachers can create a dynamic and supportive learning environment that empowers students to improve their oral proficiency.

Reflections

Let us reflect on the key obstacles faced by secondary learners in government and government-aided schools in developing their oral communication skills. Due to a lack of awareness regarding the significance of English-speaking skills, learners appeared uninterested in improving their oral proficiency in the language. Another contributing factor to the inadequate oral proficiency of secondary school learners in English is the lack of opportunities where spoken English is deemed necessary.

Another significant challenge encountered in improving the oral proficiency of secondary learners in English is the undue emphasis placed on academic performance, primarily assessed through written evaluations. This approach of hierarchically dividing students on the basis of marks scored in written exams hinders teachers from assessing the oral proficiency of learners as well as learners from identifying the need to enhance their communicative skills.

Introducing English at an early age can significantly improve proficiency. Immersive environments, such as English-only classrooms or bilingual education programs, can help students develop their language skills naturally. Creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment encourages students to practice speaking English without fear of making mistakes. Positive reinforcement and constructive feedback can boost students' confidence and motivate them to participate actively in class.

Early exposure would help students build a strong foundation in English. The curriculum has to be redesigned and made relevant to students' cultural contexts even as students get more exposure to English. By incorporating local themes, stories, and examples, teachers can make English lessons more relatable and interesting, helping students connect with the language on a deeper level. Providing access to a variety of learning resources is crucial. This includes textbooks, digital tools, and multimedia content that cater to different learning styles.

Online platforms, language learning apps, and interactive software can supplement traditional teaching methods, offering students more opportunities to practice and improve their English. Investing in teacher training is essential for improving English accessibility. Teachers should be equipped with the latest pedagogical strategies and tools to teach English effectively.

Continuous professional development and support can help teachers stay updated with new teaching methodologies and technologies.

Engaging the community and parents in the language learning process can have a significant impact. Community programmes, workshops, and language clubs can provide additional practice opportunities. Encouraging parents to support their children's learning at home, even if they are not fluent in English themselves, can reinforce the importance of the language. Encouraging learners to use English in real-life situations can enhance their practical language skills.

By focusing on these strategies, we can make English more accessible to students, enabling them to benefit fully from the opportunities that proficiency in the language provides. The goal is to equip students with the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly globalized world, opening doors to better education, employment, and personal growth.

Conclusion

The spoken word holds immense power in fostering global connectivity, facilitating cultural exchange, and promoting mutual understanding. By honing their spoken English skills, secondary school learners can actively participate in discussions on a wide range of topics. This helps students to cultivate empathy and tolerance, cross cultural barriers and work towards an inclusive society.

Engaging in spoken English activities allows students to embrace diversity, thereby contributing to the establishment of a more harmonious global society. In today's digital era, global collaboration is increasingly prevalent across various sectors. Proficiency in spoken English empowers secondary school learners to collaborate with peers worldwide and pursue international opportunities. Whether through virtual classrooms, online projects, or global partnerships, effective verbal communication in English becomes indispensable for successful collaboration. This prepares students for a future where geographical boundaries pose no limitations to cooperation, innovation, and progress on a global scale.

Enhancing the oral proficiency of secondary learners in Kerala, undoubtedly, is the need of the hour. But attaining the desired outcome is not as easy as it may seem. It may take months or even years to instill confidence in the minds of the learners to articulate their thoughts in English easily, effectively and eloquently. Though numerous strategies are mentioned in the article, implementing them in the classrooms definitely is a gradual process. From my experience, I can confidently conclude that a consistent effort will lead to the desired outcome.

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Animating Learning: Exploring Role of Puppetry in the English Classroom

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Abstract

In this paper, the multifaceted benefits of incorporating puppetry into English language teaching (ELT) are explored. Puppetry, a centuries-old art form, is explored as a dynamic and interactive teaching tool that enhances student engagement, motivation, and overall language proficiency. A review of current literature and findings from action research shows how puppetry can improve vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, and oral communication skills. It fosters creativity, boosting self-esteem, and promoting socio-emotional learning. Inclusivity can also be promoted through puppetry because it can support diverse learning needs and has the potential to make language learning more accessible for students with special educational needs. The broader cultural and cognitive benefits of puppetry, including increased cultural awareness and enhanced critical thinking skills, are also addressed in the paper. The findings suggest that puppetry not only enriches the language learning experience but also contributes to holistic student development, making it a valuable addition to language pedagogies.

Why I chose puppets as my teaching tool?

Kerala experienced abnormally high rainfall from 1st June 2018 to 19th August 2018² which resulted in severe flooding in 13 out of 14 districts in the State, causing severe damage. After the floods, as a part of the 'Athijeevanam' project, I got a chance to attend a training class at the Block Resource Centre where teachers were trained to make muppets so that teachers can entertain students when students come back to school.

The same day I made a muppet myself which I am still using. In the first school assembly after the floods, I introduced this muppet as an imaginary character, Ambili. I spoke to them as Ambili in the voice of a small child. I started by saying, 'a big flood came and affected your area, I know you are all sad.' Gradually they began to smile and were ready to talk to me (as in to Ambili the muppet). They started opening up and sharing their experiences.

2 A movie '2018' produced on these floods, provides an educational experience in itself, of courage, resilience and solidarity.

That day I understood that puppetry is really effective with my primary school students. I planned to introduce a puppet to my classroom and relate it to my classroom activities. Then I made more muppets and stick puppets. I started using them from the next academic year. In my view, better learning outcomes can be attained if teachers win the hearts of learners through different techniques, such as theatre and puppetry.

Brief history of puppetry in pedagogy

The use of innovative teaching methods in language education has gained significant attention in recent years. Among these, puppetry has emerged as a particularly engaging and effective tool. Traditionally, language education has relied on textbooks, lectures, and written exercises. While these methods can be effective, they often fail to fully engage students, or address diverse learning styles and learning levels present in a classroom.

Puppetry, with its roots in ancient storytelling traditions, offers a dynamic alternative that combines visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. By integrating puppetry into the English classroom, educators can create a more interactive and immersive learning environment. This approach not only enhances student engagement, but also facilitates deeper learning and retention of language concepts.

Puppetry can be integrated as a pedagogical tool within the primary English classroom, for students between 5 and 12 years of age. The versatility of puppetry even makes it suitable for a wide range of educational settings, from primary schools to adult education classes. Various forms of puppetry can be used in the classroom, including muppets, stick puppets and sock puppets. Different educational theories, such as constructivism, multisensory learning and social learning theories support the use of puppetry in language learning.

Incorporating puppetry into lessons allows students to participate in active learning, where they can practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a more relaxed and enjoyable context. It also provides opportunities for students to develop creativity, empathy, and teamwork. For students with special educational needs, puppetry can offer a unique and supportive way to engage with the curriculum, making language learning more accessible. Its ability to bring stories and characters to life can make complex language structures and vocabulary more relatable and easier to understand.

Methodology

I use my puppets mainly, in storytelling, to present the introductory part of a story from our course book. I check students' understanding by asking simple questions. Depending on the age of the group, you can ask questions as the teacher or as the

puppet. To communicate with beginners, I use clear gestures, this is essential. This helps create a context for the language the students are presented with, so that they can grasp the meaning. When puppets act out the language, children are motivated to learn because the puppets bring animation and fun to the English lesson.

Today's children are used to having visual cues, on TV and online classrooms. It really helps when the lessons combine visual with auditory learning. Children seem motivated and ready to engage when they can watch and listen to an actual demonstration of the words and sentences of the new language they are learning. As a result, I have realized that, having puppets and animated teaching as part of my lesson makes the language come alive in our English classroom.

Creating sketches with the blending of characters, places, and situations is an effective way to mix creativity with language. Students are usually very proud of their creations and watching their presentation is definitely a pleasure. I personally use puppets to practice grammar rules in a light-hearted way, to review content with humour and to go back to challenging textbook points, that are explained by the puppet or to the puppet.

An important thing I say in class is: "Our puppet not only knows English, but many of our Indian languages. He understands and speaks Hindi and Tamil too." Sometimes I purposefully include some simple Hindi words in between the English conversations, which has helped me to get good response from students from North Indian states too. They feel happy that puppets can also understand their language too.

Storytelling is an effective activity which we can transact in our classrooms using puppets. Introducing the characters in the stories from their textbooks, conversation between the characters to relate their textbook stories with other related stories can all be done very effectively, using puppets. It is important to use a different voice for the puppet (if he is a talking puppet), rather than your normal voice. I put my characters on my fingers, and wiggle them as I tell the story. Speak in silly voices; make the characters move and play as I tell the story. Children love when I add effects. Throw in storm sounds, wind sounds, animal noises, sing silly songs and anything else you can add to enliven the atmosphere. Sometimes I take a course book story or fairytale the class has read and turn it into a skit. Many other ideas can be generated through the teachers' creativity.

The teacher's role

The simplest way to make a box puppet theatre is to cover a low table with a blanket or tablecloth and hide behind it. Then the teacher can manipulate the puppet, shown from behind the table, and give voice to it. To work with puppets in the classroom, a teacher must first get rid of all inhibition and should come to the level of learners, which means she should be ready enough to bring the character before the learners

with the required sound modulations and actions, so that the children are able to relate to the character and find it interesting. The teacher should dance, sing and act to bring the characters to life.

The teacher has to plan well in advance and include puppets in her teaching-learning plans. She has to make puppets according to the need, and prepare dialogues for the characters. The teacher should slowly encourage students to handle puppets during the learning process. While going through group activities the teacher should provide them activities like preparing conversations for the character and presenting it through puppets, with the required voice modulations and sound backgrounds.

The teacher should encourage each and every learner of her classroom to be a part of puppet show when the learners themselves organize the event. This would make the learning inclusive.

Role of learners

Learners can themselves handle the puppets to present their part of presentations. After understanding a character well, students can use puppets to present the character sketch using puppets. Preparing conversations in groups and presenting it before the class can be done through these puppets. Students could try to understand the peculiar features of each character and could try to give voice modulations and actions accordingly. They could try to pronounce each English word with care, and with appropriate punctuations and expressions wherever required. Group presentations can help all students of a class to participate, thereby giving each student a chance to present.

Challenges

The limited availability of research on puppetry in language instruction, that too in an Indian government school context, is a limiting factor when it comes to implementing puppetry for specific learning outcomes. Resource constraints can also pose difficulties, as implementing puppetry in the classroom may require additional materials that might not be readily available within limited budgets. Time constraints within the curriculum add another layer of complexity, making it difficult for educators to find adequate time for planning, preparation, and implementation of these activities. Cultural elements must be sensitively incorporated into puppetry, to be appropriate for diverse student populations.

Maintaining student engagement can be challenging, particularly among older primary school students who might perceive puppetry as childish. Additionally, adapting puppetry activities to accommodate varying language proficiency levels requires careful scaffolding to support both beginners and advanced learners. Assessing student learning and language development through puppetry can be

problematic, as traditional assessment methods may not align with the experiential and creative nature of puppetry-based instruction.

Teachers need to be trained to effectively integrate puppetry techniques into their teaching practices. Classroom management during puppetry activities, including handling puppet manipulation and group dynamics, can be demanding for teachers, especially those unfamiliar with these techniques. Lastly, resistance to change within educational systems or school cultures can hinder the adoption of innovative teaching methods such as puppetry, particularly if there is a lack of institutional support, or recognition of its value in language instruction.

Outcomes

Using puppetry in an English classroom has led to a variety of positive outcomes for my students. First of all, puppetry encourages students to actively participate, making the learning experience more dynamic and enjoyable. The use of puppets spark students' interest and curiosity about the subject matter, keeping them more engaged throughout the class. Students learn new vocabulary and grammatical structures in a contextualized and memorable way, through puppet dialogues and stories. Puppetry involves speaking and listening activities, which help students develop their oral language skills, including pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension through interactive and engaging activities.

Creating and performing with puppets encourages students to use their imagination and creativity, enhancing their storytelling abilities. Designing puppet shows call for the exercise of creativity and critical thinking as students have to imagine interactions between characters and create dialogues. Puppetry provides a safe and supportive environment for students to express themselves, which can help shy or reluctant speakers gain confidence. Taking on different roles through puppets can help students experiment with language use and social interactions without fear of judgment.

Incorporating puppetry into an English classroom offers a multifaceted approach to language learning, promoting not only linguistic skills but also social, emotional, and cognitive development. Working in groups to create puppet shows fosters collaboration, communication, and teamwork among students. Puppetry can help students understand different perspectives and develop empathy by exploring diverse characters and situations.

Puppetry incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, which can help students better understand and retain information. The interactive nature of puppet shows makes it easier for students to recall and summarize stories, improving their comprehension skills. Puppetry can be adapted to various learning styles and levels, making it an inclusive teaching tool that meets the needs of all students. Students

with special needs, such as those with language learning delays. or social communication challenges, can particularly benefit from the structured yet flexible nature of puppetry activities.

Using puppetry to tell stories from different cultures can help students appreciate and understand cultural diversity. Puppetry can introduce students to different dialects, accents, and language varieties, enriching their linguistic experience. And perhaps the most valuable outcome for the teacher using puppetry, is for her to always have a place in her learners' heart, having really encouraged and influenced them to learn more and better.

Conclusion

The integration of puppetry in the English classroom offers a multifaceted approach to language education that extends beyond traditional teaching methods. This paper has highlighted the significant benefits of using puppetry as a pedagogical tool, demonstrating its positive impact on student engagement, development of language skills, creativity, and socio-emotional growth.

In conclusion, puppetry is a valuable and versatile tool in the English classroom that supports holistic student development. It enhances linguistic abilities, nurtures creativity, builds social-emotional skills, and fosters cultural awareness. By embracing puppetry, educators can create a more dynamic, inclusive, and engaging learning environment that benefits all students.

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