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FICTION INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING (FILL) AS A TEACHING STRATEGY IN
ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to research on the idea of framing tasks by using Multiple Intelligence theory to implement Fiction Integrated language Learning (FILL) for development of linguistic competence among graduating engineers. It also aims to equip these language learners with certain life skills by designing and implementing tasks based on real life situations. The tasks were based on the fiction titled 'The Nightingale and the Rose' by Oscar Wilde which had been taken as input both thematically and linguistically. A task related to the fiction had been designed for assessing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills which proves to be a challenging activity. The fiction had been supplemented with oral and written tasks to be done individually to assess Intrapersonal skills and then the group assignments to assess Interpersonal skills respectively. The tasks were creative and therefore challenging by nature.

Key words: MI theory, Fiction, Intrapersonal Intelligence, Interpersonal Intelligence, Task design and ESP context.

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INTRODUCTION

Designing a task based on the exploration of the content of a fiction 'The Nightingale and the Rose' by Oscar Wilde to achieve proficiency in LSRW skills remained the goal of this assignment. A total of 35 second year undergraduates from Mechanical engineering discipline of NIT Rourkela participated in the study in their digital language lab. The students were connected to the internet and, therefore, could read the story online (www.readprint.com) and access relevant details to complete individual tasks. In this story, a young man, a student is told by a woman that she would dance with him at the ball the next night if he brought her a red rose. However, he had no red roses, and is vocalizing his despair when a nightingale hears him. The nightingale is touched by the soul of this student, and desires strongly to help him. The bird flies around trying to find a red rose at various bushes but none are red as the winter and the mist has frozen the veins and buds of the rose shrub. He finally finds a white rose and makes it a brilliant rose, by finally piercing his heart on a thorn to bleed onto the white rose, and in the process dies. The student finds the rose and is thrilled, so he plucks it and brings it to his love interest. The girl rejects the rose saying it won't match her dress. Angry, the student walks away and throws the rose in a gutter where it is run over by a cart. He decides that love is ridiculous and logic is better, goes home and reads a book.

Mohanty (2011) states that students today are digitally literate and they live in a world immersed in visual literacy. Television, computer/video games, cell phones, social networking sites, emails, chat rooms and instant messaging are common forms of entertainment and communication among students of this generation. Thereby students gain the exposure to learn from the visual media. Visual literacy has become extremely important today in both education and in the wider world of business and industry; the latter because employers are increasingly demanding it of their prospective workers. Learning with technology fosters creativity in the learner as he or she is empowered to design individual representations of content using technology.

Mohanty (2009) mentions about the importance that organizations place on 'good communication skills' in the global market. This aspect deals with the humanistic aspect of the need to be well grounded in 'soft skills' as these soft skills help groom the whole personality of the individual. A person who can communicate well integrates into a team more easily and effectively, resulting in an increasing level of efficiency and productivity. The activities related to the task thus connected them to listen from their peers, speak on issues related to the topic, read the story for collecting relevant information for completion of the task and write for individual assessment. Thus the main objective of conducting the task was to evaluate the linguistic competence of the engineering graduates in negotiating LSRW skills were focused upon. It helped for holistically understanding the theme and to connect it to real world situations. Mehisto (2007), shows several needs to be considered to successfully implement those programmes in the future, such as taking into account the environment in which the action takes place (involvement and support of stakeholders) as well as the learning environment, the personal information about the learners, their language needs, etc The success of this approach in ESP context lies in the teachers changing their attitude to teaching by being only a facilitator not an instructor. The practice of testing only the wisdom of the learners should give way to assessing various other abilities also possessed by the students.

Learners' English needs depend on various expectations, interpretations and individual value judgments (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989). Thus, in language learning context, learners' needs could be analyzed as objective needs and subjective needs or from two different directions like target needs and learning needs. While objective needs are derived from various real life language use situations and current language proficiency and difficulties of learners, subjective needs derive information from affective and cognitive factors such as personal confidence, attitudes, learning expectations and learning strategies of learners. Generally the learners complain that the prescribed textbooks do not satisfy their needs. They feel high scarcity of appropriate words while at work place. Srivastava (2009), comments on the aspects of language learning in the Indian scenario, "Looking in Indian context 'English for specific purposes' is at its infancy. Learners feel that the things they have learned in their educational institutions or training centers are not proving helpful when they enter the workplace or once they have completed their education. The problem does not restrict only to those students who have studied in Hindi medium schools but also with many who have got their education from good English medium schools".

Howard Gardener's Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory (1983) assumes that a child is gifted with one or more of the eight/nine intelligence. (Linguistic, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Logical, Visual, Spatial, Musical, Natural and newly added to it the Existential abilities) and if the teacher can harness those abilities any challenging content can be transmitted to him/her. The teacher should be willing to explore the latent intelligences in his students and take into account his preferences and learning styles so that the outcome can be meaningful.

It is believed that if this theory is implemented in language learning context the students will:

- Show increased independence, self-esteem, responsibility and self-direction.
- Show greatly reduced behavioral/attention/learning problems at school and home.
- Have improved cooperative skills.
- Show increased ability to work 'multimodally' (use multiple intelligences), when doing reports, multimedia projects, etc.
- Demonstrate improved leadership skills.
- Retain information.

The tasks so were based upon the multiple intelligences theory, though limited to develop and assess the **Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligence** which was designed on Gardeners museum and apprenticeship concept. Gardener believes in two institutions of learning: apprenticeship and museum. A museum, like a learning environment in educational setting, is fit for intrapersonal intelligence or for personal competence where students inquire, explore and experiment. Intrapersonal Intelligence is an important link for successful life experiences. When applied in the educational context with desired learning outcomes, students tend to identify their own strength which ultimately provides self directed learning. They achieve skills, learn and approach problems in their own way, and learn to reflect, revise and improve their personality to match their language skills according to the world around them.

Intrapersonal learners may be encouraged writing personal journals, discuss thinking strategies on abstract themes, facilitate meta-cognition techniques like describing products and suggest independent projects. As students develop their presentation skills, their confidence grows, and they becomes more comfortable explaining their strengths and interests to others.

Apprenticeship refers to a workshop set for interpersonal development. Here, knowledge is gained in action everyday from mentors, peers, collaborative activities or communities at large. Activities that improve linguistic competence for interpersonal skills include storytelling, word play, creative writing, working on puzzles, solving riddles, word processing, news paper activities, skits, plays, group work, discussions, debates or co operative learning. Activities can be also conducted in a group addressing the area of responsibility. For a group outcome group performance must be assessed. Peer assessment, systematic faculty observation and the reflective reports ensure the efficacy of the process. While individuals may gain help from other members of the team to improve their performance, this is an inevitable aspect of teamwork and reflects the outcome. In the apprenticeship concept interpersonal intelligence promotes the ability to work cooperatively in a group as well as the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally with other people. Interpersonal intelligence in ESP students can be developed by involving them in different preplanned and structured situations in which inter-dependence on other people is required for the successful completion of a task. By working together on problem-solving tasks, students share actively in the thinking and learning process. Guided participation epitomizes the nature of this collaboration.

Task design and implementation

The concept of tasks is similar to that of communicative events as defined by Munby (1978). The difference is that language variables, rather than sociolinguistic variables, are highlighted in the task-based approach. They are significant for engineering students who are expected to perform real-world tasks. The tasks that relate to real life challenges are reflected in the story. The students had learner autonomy to choose from the tasks. The duration of the lab activity extended to three hours. The teacher or facilitator acts as a guide, not as an instructor.

Participants: Second year engineering graduates (Mechanical, Chemical, Electrical).

Venue Digital language lab, National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela, Orissa

Learning strategy: Application of Multiple Intelligence Theory

Mode of assessment: Formative

Resources: ICT integrated language lab

Aim

- Individual tasks to develop a holistic personality.
- Group tasks to develop academic, individual and co-operative competence to apply in real world situations.

Objectives

1. To make students identify their strength and weakness in the areas of LSRW skill
Give the scope for learner autonomy by providing choice of assignments.
2. To provide opportunities for students to express their communication skills in their preferred learning styles.
3. To make students recognize the positive aspects of team work.

4. To reflect and assess the outcome of the tasks (individually and in group) they participate in.

Tasks

Intrapersonal Activities (Choose any one)

Note: Students have to produce the assignment in written form in the sheet provided.

1. Describe a similar character as you visualized in a movie or tele-serial highlighting the humanitarian values in the theme.
2. Narrate a similar incident that one of your friends had undergone and the consequences thereafter in real life situations.

Interpersonal Activities (Choose any one)

Students have to give an outline of the task designed in the sheet provided.

1. Debate in favour or against the nightingales' role in the fiction.
2. Role-play /Act any part of the story.

The students had to perform two tasks, one individual and another as group activity. Separate sheets were provided for assessment where they had to mention their name and registration number. The writing skills was assessed in individual assignment and the outline provided for oral assignment provided better clarity to assess members of a group in oral assessment. The assessment was based on the presentation factors, resources used and the classroom dynamics.

The facilitator rather becomes the resource person to the learners on matters related to the proficiency in clubbing groups for group activities (to choose from oral or written) as per their preference of doing tasks. In ranking the importance of the skills, students ranked writing as their least competent skill and regarded speaking and writing as the most important skills needed to master the language. (Othman, 2005).

West (1967) remarks "Language is a skill; its examination should be a test of ability to use the language but the tendency is always to make the examination a knowledge examination, to make it a sampling of facts" (p.45). Therefore, a fool-proof and transparent system of assessment is to be put in place so that various capabilities of the learners can be evaluated objectively and necessary revisions can be effected in the teaching/ learning process.

The term 'authentic assessment' or alternative assessment is appropriate for any type of assessment that requires students to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in daily life, or where students are required to complete tasks that have real world applications (Wellington Paul, 2002). In formative assessment the students are made to involve in the assessment process unlike traditional assessment thus allowing them to watch and assess their own performance. They feel a sense of accomplishment and notice their level of improvement.. Scaffolded self-assessment promotes learning, critical thinking and confidence building which involves both teachers and learners (Visoi, 2007).

A report on learning outcomes

Rayan (2007) stated that the involvement of ESP learners in designing their own courses will enhance their interest and motivation, foster critical thinking skills, make them take part in various language activities enthusiastically, resulting in effective learning. He also emphasized that such a step would make the teaching learning process enjoyable and paves the way for achieving course objectives.

These learner- centered tasks require the learners working with self and in groups to take responsibility for the successful completion of their own assigned projects and thereby develop certain skills like intrapersonal and interpersonal and also learn to work in a team. The learners work in small groups or pairs as grouped according to their preference of the tasks they choose. This task, thus, allows them to explore their learning styles and the linguistic intelligence they own or other intelligences they could apply. Students get an exposure to team work early in their career before they enter into their jobs and realize that success depends upon their ability to work in teams in a supportive environment. The question that we constantly ask is whether we should teach English as a subject and prepare students for examinations or should we teach it as a life skill and prepare them for the workplace. Rayan (2008) observes that over the last decade, increasing attention has been focused on the importance of communication skills for engineering students in India but

not on the problems of Communication Apprehension (CA) in them and approaches for reducing CA. A simple definition of CA is anxiety or fear of communicating in different situations. Rayan (2008) mentions the need of commutainment activities, which refers to communication through entertainment. It is essential in the English as a Second Language (ESL) class as it creates an environment of communication and entertainment. It has been found that commutainment activities such as role-plays, puzzles and problem-solving exercises promote meaningful communication, provide fun, develop team-work, foster creative thinking and create opportunities for learners to interact with one another.

The linguistic intelligence was tested through the written tasks and the oral tasks which were based upon the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. Though oral communication in English is more important in modern business relationships across the globe, assessment of oral communication skills do not form a part of the summative assessment format in most Universities. Phonetics is taught in theory, but not in practice. MacCarthy (1967) points out:

The error here consists in failing to appreciate that the theory to be found in the textbooks needs to be predigested and turned to practical account, if pupils are to be taught to pronounce a foreign language acceptably, and if they are to understand in their turn how phonetic theory can be profitably applied (p.106).

It is satisfying that students even presented the matter by proper analysis of the content of the story, the theme of love. Some students even related similar themes from current Bollywood movies and many others narrated real life incidents that occurred in their friends or their own lives. The debates saw heated arguments for and against “emotions” in the competitive world. Above all, the skit based on different emotions with a twist in the climax had been really encouraging. There was enthusiasm among learners and every student could perform at least a minor role which ultimately raised their self esteem. Aviv (2007) in her article ‘Don’t be shy’ states, “Because speaking well is often crucial to getting a job nearly half of American colleges and universities require a public speaking or communications course, according to the National Communication Association.”

Research Findings

1. The students became skilled at developing their own projects, gathering necessary resources and materials, and making well-planned presentations of all types.
2. They show interest in making presentations on individual projects including songs, poems, puzzles and group participation activities like skits, games, surveys etc.
3. There was a paradigm shift as students showed more interests to receive the feedback given by the teacher and their friends than the grades assigned to them.
4. They learned not only to respect each other, but also to appreciate and promote the unique talents and abilities of their peers, an indication of team spirit.
5. Students who had previously been unsuccessful in school in using language skills became high achievers in the new experiences.

Conclusion

Gaur (2008) states that in order to teach communication skills, the traditional ELT methods are not enough. They have to be supplemented with a different knowledge base and have to borrow heavily from behavioral sciences and management. Since the emphasis is on the use of English not only for the communication of one’s own thoughts, but also on using persuasive techniques or making communication scientifically objective. The methods of analyzing the receiver’s personality and the factors affecting the decision making process before the communication loop ends, have to be a part of the teaching and learning process.

New skills emerged: Students discovered new-found capabilities and interests. Others exhibited qualities of leadership. In addition, self-confidence and motivation increased significantly. Finally, students developed responsibility, self-reliance and independence as they took an active role in shaping their own learning experiences. The feedback form also provided suggestions for further improvement of the course.

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