

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEWSPAPER IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

The newspaper is known to be an influential tool in the sharing of information and improving the language skills of undergraduates in this vastly developing global village. Newspapers expand the knowledge horizon of undergraduates on a plethora of current events happening around us. The reason to choose the English newspaper as an instrument in the teaching of English is two-fold –the newspaper is a cost-effective, easily accessible, friendly on the wallet textbook that provides the reader with up-to-date knowledge on a vast array of topics, whilst being a language developer which is a simple thesaurus that unconsciously improves the reader’s vocabulary, in many instances. With emphasis being put on the need to improve the English language skills of undergraduates, coupled with the soaring cost of textbooks, the newspaper has stepped in to perform the dual roles of expanding the knowledge bank on a variety of topics in an ever-changing environment and teaching the four language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking to the younger generation. Although social media has stolen a march over news-dissemination portals in the modern world, globally, the newspaper still remains a stalwart in the industry and, works hand in glove with language teaching to inculcate the reading habit among undergraduates and enrich their knowledge bank whilst simultaneously improving their language skills. Hence this paper aims to bring under the spotlight, the benefits of teaching English by using the English newspaper in the undergraduate ESL classroom.

Key Words: Newspapers, Teaching Tools, English Language Skills, Undergraduates

Introduction

Over the years, progressive changes have been made in the English language teaching methodology in a multifaceted environment. Over-reliance on textbooks has produced an environment which is less productive, and interaction which should contain both verbal and non-verbal components in the teaching and learning activities in the classroom are significantly absent (Obanya, 2002). This could kill the interest in undergraduates to learn the language skills and make language learning stressful (Tafida and Dalhat, 2014). Nwoke (1987) is of the view that a majority of language activities found in language learning textbooks do not conform to the true nature of communicative teaching. Additionally, language learning textbooks have the tendency to create a dull, traditional learning atmosphere (Khorsheed and Rassoul, 2018). Thus it is beneficial to students' learning, to introduce new teaching tools in the English language classroom that would have a lasting impact on student interaction and involvement (Khorsheed and Rassoul, 2018). Khorsheed and Rassoul (2018), further enunciate that "Newspapers are an important component of mass media which play a pivotal role in an individual's life" and that "newspapers are considered as vehicles of literacy that deliver knowledge. The use of the English newspaper in the English language classroom helps to improve vocabulary, increases knowledge and makes the learning environment more interactive and fun, which in turn will lead to undergraduates learning the language unconsciously (Tafida and Dalhat, 2014). Krashen (2001, 2004) is of the view that "there is sufficient evidence to show that Free Voluntary Reading is highly beneficial for language acquisition, because it can be a source of ideas and information which direct instruction cannot compete with, and moreover, it will produce the highest levels of competence."

Sanderson (1999) was of the view that 'the newspaper is an invaluable source of authentic materials, and the use of the newspaper in the language classroom is aligned with current teaching pedagogy practices.' "Efficient language teaching material should be authentic" Brown (2007), and as such as such the use of the English newspaper in the classroom creates and authentic language learning environment (Wang, 2010).

The Importance of the Newspaper

Today, mass media has seen unprecedented development, moving from the newspaper, radio, television, to the internet and social media. A look at the society in which we live, tends to swing the pendulum in the direction of technology, and thereby, in the arena of mass media, newspapers have been relegated to the back benches. Yet there is a segment of society that waits expectantly for, and deems it fit to start the day with the newspaper and its headlines (Mittal, 2014). The world around us has seen rapid changes lately, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing the people to its feet. Hence there is a thirst for people to be kept informed whether by social media or through the traditional media tools. The newspaper however, remains the grand old dame of knowledge sharing. Newspapers are a veritable part of mass media, and perform the role of providing up-to-date information on local and global happenings. The texts found in newspapers are simple and form ideal texts in the teaching of English. As they have a general educational value and are read in a stress-free environment, undergraduates are more inclined to read and learn from a newspaper than a text book. Language can be read, written, spoken, and used to teach and establish relationships as well as develop ourselves and our societies (Tafida and Dalhat, 2014). The importance of media in general is to inform, and, it is believed that such a role played by the English newspaper, inter-twined with education, will encourage and motivate undergraduates, whilst assisting them to sharpen their language skills.

English language has become an indispensable part of modern life. So are newspapers (Mittal, 2014).

The English Newspaper and the Language Classroom

Language permits us to teach and be taught. Language is the very essence that makes us human, and is the most complex form of communication used by any culture (Tafida and Dalhat, 2014).

The use of the English newspaper as a teaching tool is very practical as it is easily accessible to the undergraduates, and, English newspapers cover an assortment of information. Additionally, the English newspapers can be used as an effective teaching device to improve the language skills of undergraduates by motivating them to improve their language skills.

Hence it could be said that, in order to increase the English language skills of undergraduates, the intertwining of teaching English through the use of the English newspaper in the ESL classroom will yield positive results.

Education World (2011) suggests ten reasons as to why newspapers are considered as effective classroom devices in the teaching of English.

- Newspapers provide reading material for undergraduates of diverse levels of ability.
- Newspapers provide very current information which motivates reading and discussion. According to Clandfield and Foord (2011), newspapers are current and consist of different kinds of texts such as narratives, stories, letters, advertisements, reports etc. They opine that ‘newspapers help students to see realistic examples of the practical applications of grammar and comprehension that can be used in reading and writing experiences both in and outside the classroom.’ Using newspapers in the English language classroom provides real-life situations of effectively acquiring and using English as a communication tool’ (Education World, 2011).
- Newspapers provide fun ways to learn the language. Teaching and learning become more motivating and enduring, when a teacher uses materials such as the newspaper to enhance the teaching and learning processes Oguniyi and Famuyiwa (2011).
- Their content can be easily adapted in the teaching and learning processes According to Ajayi (2020), newspapers provide activity-based teaching and learning material which are learner-centred.
- Newspapers bridge the gap between the learning experience in the classroom and going on in the real world, thus making learning process more interesting and stimulating.
- They build good reading habits that will last a lifetime.
- They can be used for classroom and group activities as they can be cut, marked clipped pasted filed etc. Newspapers cater to the interest areas of all individuals.
- They are a cost-effective way of providing education.
- Newspapers contain simple and practical vocabulary and they have a clear written structure.

According to Ali and Devi (2013), the newspaper is considered to be a source of learning language effectively, which is very productive and has no boundaries. The language used in a newspaper is simple and undergraduates are able to relate to this day-to-day language and identify with the real life events reported in newspapers Ali and Devi (2013). Globally, English language teaching and learning methodologies have seen phenomenal changes with the English

language learning classroom taking on a multi-dimensional environment. With role plays, discussions and pair work taking centre-stage in most English language teaching classroom, the newspaper provides suitable topics of discussion in the classroom for the successful language acquisition by undergraduates.

Using the English Newspaper in the Undergraduate Classroom

Teaching English to non-native speakers of English could be a challenging task (Mittal, 2014) and newspapers play an important role by providing undergraduates who are non-native speakers of English with very current and reliable material to aid them in the learning of English. Words are the building block of language and play a fundamental role in the world of language (Lotfi, 2007). Richards and Renandya (2002) are of the view that vocabulary is the anchor of being proficient in language, whilst also playing the all-important role of deciding how well learners of a language write, read, listen and speak (Ghanbari, Esmaili and Shamsaddini, 2015). Inculcating the reading habit among undergraduates, who are on the final lap of their education with the world of employment looming before them, will undoubtedly enable them to take confident strides towards their chosen careers; and in this endeavor, promoting the reading of newspapers in the English language classroom will undoubtedly encourage these millennials to improve their vocabulary, grammar and thinking skills, and provide them with an opportunity to exchange and express ideas on a wide variety of topics (Mehta, 2010).

Newspapers seem to be an attractive teaching tool that links learners to reality. This is especially noted in the language classrooms that were accustomed to using regular textbooks that are probably fabricated and tailored in a way that is far from real life incidents. Newspapers grant students the chance to deal with real English in addition to experiencing natural reactions due to reading real life events and incidents. This experience is priceless for language learners as they get to tackle real English and get in touch with an immediate source that reflects the foreign culture which normally accompanies the target language. In addition, It has been proved that newspapers enhance readership, enrich learners' vocabulary, improve their writing skills, cultivate critical thinking, clarify cultural values, broaden readers' perspectives and strengthen real life decision making and problem solving skills (Bankole and Babalola, 2011; El-Madwi, 2014). Furthermore, reading newspapers would definitely give rise to and elevate students' sense of linguistic achievement in addition to boosting their confidence and motivation.

It is important for the language teacher to incorporate certain techniques in the classroom in order that undergraduates will develop their reading habit through the use of the newspaper. Stressing on the need for the daily reading of the English newspaper will not only motivate the learner but also gradually eliminate the fear that the learner has for the English language (Khorsheed and Rassoul, 2018). In order to achieve this, teachers could adopt some measures as stated below to inculcate and popularize the reading of newspapers among undergraduates (Khorsheed and Rassoul, 2018):

- Motivate them to read the English newspaper regularly.
- Encourage them to read the most interesting section of the newspaper, and report to their peers in class. This is an ideal activity for pair work and group work.
- Stress the importance of reading the newspaper – that it improves vocabulary, writing and reading skills, assists in the process of acquiring the language and helps in expanding general knowledge boundaries.

- Use reading comprehension passages from the newspaper and teach them the reading techniques of skimming and scanning for information. Teach them to read and understand the whole meaning of the passage by focusing on the context.
- Encourage them to keep a dictionary and refer up the meaning of words that are new to them. This will aid in improving their vocabulary. They should write the meaning of these words and use them in their pieces of writing. Encouraging them to write the gist of articles will aid in the teaching of summary writing, which is an important component in academic writing.
- Motivation is an all important factor in prodding the undergraduate to read the newspaper. This will surely act as an ice-breaker and provide a door-way to kindle the interest in reading the newspaper.
- Encourage them to divide the newspaper into sections such as the headlines, news, feature stories, editorial classifieds pictorials, and, in groups discuss one section. Preparing a presentation on each section will act as an unconscious learning strategy, where the undergraduate focuses on the activity and not on learning the language. This is an ideal way of improving grammar components such as tenses and sentence structures.

Aligning English Skills with Employability

In the modern world where globalization and industrialization have emerged as key players, the momentous role that is afforded to competency in English is vital in all domains of life. Learning English is always associated with globalization where nations are required to display capabilities on the global stage for the sake of the economy (Lauder, 2008; Rido, 2019). The universal workforce of the 21st century stresses the need for human resources which are young and skilled in addition to being competent in technical skills and academic skills whilst giving priority to English language (Di Grapello, 2013; Di Grapello, Kruse, and Tandon, 2011; Hendarman, 2010).

Rido (2019) enunciates the fact that graduate employability pivots around the ability to communicate in English among other factors, which is an indicator that university undergraduates are aware of the importance of English to secure employment as it is a lingua franca of international business communication. This is in congruence with the results of surveys on employability skills based on employers' perspectives which claimed that good communication skills are imperative in increasing employability and career promotion. (Abdul Kadir, Noor, and Shakizah, 2015; Al-Mutairi, Naser, and Saeid, 2014; Ranasinghe and Ranasinghe, 2012; Ting, Marzuki, Chuah, Misieng, and Jerome, 2017). In this backdrop, there is a crying need to encourage undergraduates boost and hone their English language skills to secure their future in the ever-evolving global arena. Hence this article focuses on the potential that the newspaper offers in shaping and improving the language skills of undergraduates. It also highlights the need to inculcate the need to improve the English language skills of undergraduates by using the readily available and easily accessible newspaper that provides copious activities, as a learning resource.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, competency in the English language among undergraduates is a requirement which is an expectation that prospective employers look for, and the need to find innovative methods to improve the English language proficiency is of prime importance – hence the introduction of innovative tools such as the newspaper, to achieve this end is crucial. Newspapers provide an interactive environment for language teaching which happens unconsciously and the ‘science and methodology’ in making this a successful mode to improve English language competency among undergraduates to upgrade their language knowledge must be encouraged (Mittal, 2014). Considering the fact that the English newspaper is a cost-effective and easily available language learning resource, it is important to train undergraduates to read the English newspaper in an organized manner and gain maximum mileage in sharpening their English language competency.

Many instructors and educators have incorporated the use of newspapers as an effective learning tool whether in the language classroom or in other subjects since they are up to date and can easily replace the old typical outdated learning textbooks (Sanderson, 1999). Newspapers seem to be an attractive teaching tool that links learners to reality, and will bring a breath of fresh air to a language classroom that is centred around a textbook, as it comprises up-to-date real life incidents. This could be a priceless experience for learners, paving the way for them to learn the English language in a novel way. It has been proved that newspapers enhance readership, enrich learners' vocabulary, improve their writing skills, cultivate critical thinking, clarify cultural values, broaden readers' perspectives and strengthen real life decision making and problem solving skills (Bankole and Babalola, 2011; El-Madwi, 2014). Furthermore, reading newspapers would definitely give rise to and elevate undergraduates' sense of linguistic achievement in addition to boosting their confidence and motivation.

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