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CULTURE INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CILL): USING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE AS A LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This research based classroom activity conducted among engineering students, NIT Rourkela, Odisha of India reports the outcome of an experiment based on cross cultural communication in ESP context. The task designed explores Multiple Intelligence theory (Gardener 1983) and reports how it enriches English language skills. Culture as the learning strategy was integrated in the task to test the engineering students' awareness of other cultures from personal and professional perspectives. Students were asked to explore a country (here Russia) by surfing the internet, where individual computers and internet facility had been provided in the digital language lab. The assignment focused on individual and group tasks. The individual tasks were based on written assignments where reading and writing skills were examined whereas the group tasks focused on aural-oral skills. They were given choice of profession based on Multiple Intelligence theory (8 intelligences like logical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, kinesthetic, musical, verbal, artistic, environmentalist etc) and clubbed together for presentation as per their choice of profession. They were assessed on their presentation skills. The written assignments received from the students elicited some interesting observations and oral presentations were perceived to be highly encouraging. Students responded that skills that they never thought they possessed came to the fore during the course of the experiment. Some students discovered musical, artistic, literary, mathematical and other new-found skills and abilities. They also showed responsible behavior and independent thinking as they took active roles in shaping their own learning experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Connectivism as a Learning Approach

Siemens (2004) states that language learning takes place best in the social context. Due to practical limitations of gaining such exposure in the prevailing scenario; **connective approach** can be used to teach language skills in the engineering colleges. It can be done by immersion in a social context through authentic materials and online environments which would integrate humanistic and technological aspects.

To make the learning and teaching experience more relevant, students and teachers should be involved with the target community through participatory research where they interact with the members and explore the nature of communication that exists there.

Different courses/sub-courses may integrate goal and purpose of the tasks, exercises, activities or projects, which should be psycho-linguistically valid and follow formative evaluation. They can be open-ended, communicative tasks or

activities designed for product learning. The objective as well as the subjective needs should be enhanced. The professionals need English skills in reading their specialist literature, academic journals, attending conferences/lectures/technical or business negotiation in English, communicating with different client abroad or at work-place. These are all perceived as target needs which are very much language-centered and content-centered and are objective by nature.

There is an enormous need to develop written English skills particularly in electronic form. The English curriculum should include developing English language skills for composing and presenting it through electronic media. English classes should include tasks that involve technology related activities like e-mails, chats, online discussions, group discussions, use of internet for intercultural understanding, power point presentations, video conferencing, virtual simulations and even audio and video productions. Students need to be given choices and opportunity to take decisions individually and in groups about how to organize and present projects. They must be encouraged to practice self-evaluation and peer-evaluation. This can promote critical thinking abilities as they get an opportunity to interact with their peers.

(Sasidharan, 2012)

The learning environment should provide students with an experience closely approximating real life in a professional setting. New technologies can bring the global village closer together and this promotes interaction with different cultures. It develops written and oral communication skills, the capacity for inquiry and research, critical thought and analysis, and the effective use of information technology. The learning approach should place responsibility on the students to determine how to apply existing knowledge and how to go about finding out what they do not know thereby providing a connected or customized approach. To quote Reimer (2002), "Rarely is it possible to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material and sometimes no really suitable published materials exist for certain learners' needs. The role of ESP teachers, thus, involves choosing suitable published materials from a variety of reliable and valid

sources, adapting materials when published ones are not suitable, and even writing new materials if nothing suitable exists" (p. 93).

Statement of the problem

A framework of a teaching model for ESP students to integrate culture into the curriculum had been designed. Tasks were separately designed for individual and group tasks. The group tasks were challenging enough to include cooperative competence. Culture shapes human behaviour, attitudes, and values. The aim of the task is to expand the cultural and intellectual dimensions of the ESP students and to broaden their outlook. The teachers need to adapt to curriculum designing and selecting materials with technology as an aid. They need to seek formative assessment measures like setting criteria for appraising performances and seek corrective measures for continuous improvement. This helps to meet individual needs and therefore promotes readiness for learning. This type of activities can inculcate leadership skills, critical thinking skills which give differentiating capabilities as comparison and contrast, and cause/effect relations.

Methods and Material

CULTURE- INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CILL)
Assignment-1 (Individual)
 TOPIC----INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS
 Name Roll No..... Date.....
 I. Write a brief note on Russia

2. Make a comparative study of Russia and India in matters related to their (a).Literature (b).Arts and Crafts (c).Science and innovation (d).music.(e).Lifestyle (f).Tourism (g).philosophy(h).Sports.
Choose one area as per your preference.

Similarities	Contrasts
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The aim of Assignment-1 was to know how far the students were acquainted with culture of other countries from various perspectives. Options in various areas they need to introspect, gave an insight into their own strength and areas of interest which they gained by reflection. The use of appropriate technology became a learning tool. Students surfed the net especially wikis to get the first hand information of the places of virtual visit. The brief note on the country (here Russia) helped to develop cognitive factors of learning. The teacher indicated that the students who accessed more information in brief would get better grades and so students had to revise their findings on the country with supporting details that truly improved their research aptitude. The teacher instructed the students to find a minimum of three contrasts and maximum five areas of similarities. Students found

this idea relaxed and were motivated to do the group assignments.

Similarities

For e.g., in the area of life style students could find that

- *Both countries have a wide range of ethnic groups*
- *Both countries believe in democracy*
- *Both countries are influenced by western culture*
- *There is cultural diversity in both the countries*
- *Both the countries are shifting to nuclear family style etc.*

Contrasts

- *Russian men wear Kaftas, kosovorotka and women wear kokoshnik and sarafas*
- *Education is free to all Russians*
- *Per-capita income is high in Russia*

- *Literacy rate is higher at 99.4*
- *Food items like fish and mushroom are used and they mostly use berries and honey*

The group activities were highly interesting. As a variety of job options were given students had to find out their own specialized areas of interest. They had to immerse in the role of their preferred job and had to research on job prospects in Russia and thereafter make a comparative study to implement these research ideas in India. It had to be presented in a professional setting.

After the set time allotted for reflection, students were grouped into jobs of their preferred interests. They set into action to present group presentations

competing against themselves in a group and with other groups to present the best. The presentations were quite challenging because the same professions were chosen by one or more groups. It created business entrepreneurs, journalists, music directors, architectures etc. each group giving power point presentations and concentrating on the oral part that they had to deliver to complete the presentation. They added visuals and sounds which gave a dynamic effect to the presentation. Some others chose designing space craft for interplanetary missions.

Assignment-2 (Group)

Imagine that you had been to Russia on a mission related to your hobby/dream job. Now you are back to India. You are asked to give an oral presentation in power point mode in groups on the details of your purposeful visit.

(You can assume the role of an artist/designer, athlete, journalist, scientist, music composer, entrepreneur, researcher, or an environmentalist or any other area of your interest.)

Students have choice to support their power point presentations in verbal or non verbal mode like

1. Verbal....narrations, commentaries, reports, skits, poems, songs etc
2. Visualspictures, posters, graphs, charts etc
3. Non-verbal---mimes, sound effects, music etc

Put the classifications above into two groups

1. Verbal --as mentioned (no correction)
 2. Non Verbal----pictures posters graphs,charts,mimes,music etc
- Omit 3

Assessment pattern:

It is necessary that the theme of the presentation would focus on Russian culture. The students after discussion need to give a brief outline of their

individual role in the worksheet provided where they have to brief in their own words the structure of their presentation and their own contribution in the group. The groups will be graded accordingly.

Worksheet –CULTURE- INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CILL)
Outline
Mode of presentation.....
My contribution in the group.....
Feedback What could you learn from this assignment?
Suggestions (if any) for improvement.....

Findings of task-based experiment

- It is essential to attempt individual tasks having reflective sessions with the teachers for appropriate learning outcomes, prior to attempting group tasks.
- Group tasks also may be conducted with the teachers’ supervision. Many doubts arise when students conduct it themselves for the first time especially to know if their attempts in presenting creative aspects are permissible or not. So teachers have to give clear guidelines, otherwise, this may become a barrier to effective presentation.
- Students feel encouraged and learn from their peers to appropriately use technology in presentations. Critical thinking skills are applied as in real life contexts and the learning outcome had been defined and turned out to be an enriching experience as expected. It rightly seems to develop different levels of competence among learners.
- The teachers of English can take the lead in the organizing such interactive sessions and works on it successfully in follow up

sessions. Exposure to corporate culture, interaction with experts from business and industry, management experts, academicians specializing in various fields, scientists and technologists etc can empower the engineering students to be better communicators in their workplace or when they face real life situations. Real world tasks as defined by Nunan (1989) “are those which require learners to approximate in class the sorts of behavior required of them in the world beyond the classroom” (p.40).

- The research findings along with the suggested measures try to incorporate activities and tasks designed on a learner-centered approach which can be negotiated and implemented as per individual needs. English language learning should not be limited to the prescribed syllabus. It should ultimately help ESP learners develop qualities of confidence, initiative and responsibility in developing their language skills. There need to be

learners' interaction with teachers, peers and the learning materials.

- These types of academic activities offer enough opportunities for the students and challenge their intellectual growth in language learning or else the learning remains stagnated in the prevailing system of teaching, learning, and assessment patterns. Students are repeatedly engaged in such activities that promote rote learning and conventionality. Thereby the creative energy of bright students remains untapped and most of the students score an average of 60 -80% of marks without getting right orientation to develop and apply and develop their skills. They should have not only good communication skills in this digital era but acquire intra and extra-organizational communication skills too. The basis of the engineering graduates' professional development includes team working ability, effective communication, problem solving approach, critical thinking ability and the awareness of social, cultural, ethical, environmental and a plethora of other issues associated with the practice of engineering profession.

Suggestions

The teachers should learn to be facilitators, not instructors and help learners take facility for their own learning" (Larsen and Freeman, 2000, p.53).The text books should not be the sole source of learning. Neo millennial learners are capable of seeking the help of modern technology to meet their current needs. The basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing should be practiced in classrooms and teachers have to provide personal attention in developing these skills in a systematic way.

- Self access language centers (Carter, 1999) can be established in each institution to provide learning materials, both print and electronic so that the students can learn all the skills integrated to language learning and also self assess how far they have reached the achieved the proficiency level required. This can be done during leisure

hours or special slots allotted for it. They may be made to avail e-books, interact with experts through video-conferencing, CD and VCDs relating to various accent and pronunciation. Though the cost of setting up this learning centers are high, the benefits the students derive in the long run are worth- setting up of this facility should be made a precondition for availing recognition/affiliation by the AICTE/university concerned.

- Professional development of the teachers is one of the most neglected aspects in engineering colleges of Orissa. Occasional in-service orientations in practice are not effective and short term orientation programs without insisting on any assessment of teacher development do not serve the purpose. Therefore there is a need of a resource centre for language teaching integrating technology and impart pre-service training to teachers of English.(Levy hubbard,2006; Asdmari 2010)
- Choice in doing assignments should be provided to make the learners autonomous. (David Nunan, 1995).Students needs guidance and constructive feedback so that they could evaluate it themselves. This can be done through self-evaluation or peer evaluation. Students need guidance and constructive feedback so that they will be able to correct it by themselves. Teachers can adopt measures as per the classroom structure to evaluate and thereby finalize the results.
- The assessment system prevailing in most colleges, especially self financing ones, is quite defective as it ignores assessment of listening, speaking or reading skills. A mechanism should be evolved to assess these skills also for awarding grades .An effective monitoring system by appointing external examiners with the completion of certain projects, and assignments including listening and oral tests need to be examined. If the acquisition of leadership skills, critical thinking abilities is also

brought under the purview of authentic assessment, students and teachers would seek measures to achieve these skills. Teachers should provide scope for improvement and thereby an ongoing assessment strategy should be adopted to increase the motivational level of the students till the targeted goals are achieved.

Limitations of the study

The findings of the study are based on the ground situations prevailing in the engineering colleges of Orissa which may not be replicated elsewhere fully. The suggestions made in the study are based on the current trends and practices. These are to be discussed among learners, teachers, curriculum framers, policy makers and administrators and a consensus is to be evolved for its implementation. Further research is called for in the areas not covered in this study.

Conclusion

Intercultural communication is the need of the hour in the global scenario. Engineers are required to travel widely and come into contact with other cultures and to fulfill their professional needs. Therefore familiarity with different cultural backgrounds empowers them. Modern technology helps to connect to various groups of people in far off places. E-mails, chats, blogs, video calling etc., provide ample opportunities to foster global contacts. If the students are provided such facilities and guidance they can develop a broad perspective and face future workplace needs.

The study reveals that students need soft skill training for personality development, training in interview-skills, intra and interpersonal communication. This would help them to develop their self-esteem and attend job interviews and communication tasks dealing with project training. Though these cannot be achieved in the regular classes where qualifying grades remains the prime objective and where there are time constraints to finish the prescribed course, such training can be impacted by setting up language learning Centers. English teachers can take the lead. Enough number of teachers should be recruited in each college to handle such classes. The time set for the students

must be when they are not pressurized with examination schedule. The teachers' proficiency in handling such sessions would highly rely on the motivation level of students to attend the class. Students should be rightly oriented towards such classes. This would improve the employability prospects and humanitarian values of future engineers.

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