Competency in Teaching English as a Second Language in a Multicultural Classroom

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Abstract: Learning or teaching a second language is not an easy task. It can be accomplished only by understanding the problems and difficulties of a student. Though earlier many researches have discussed different methods to teach English as a second language to the non-native speakers, this research emphasizes on the talent and aptitude of a teacher to handle their classes efficiently. Any method can be reinforced for this process but only a competent teacher can achieve their goal. Also it emphasizes on the need of a teacher to understand and admire the essence of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Teaching learning process, Approaches and methodologies, multicultural competency and strategies.

Introduction:

English as an international language is rapidly progressing and its need as a standard language is increasing all over the world, especially in Non-English speaking countries. Globalization and reform movements – as recently witnessed around the world – invite waves of change impacting aspects of human life, including the language and exchange. (Canagarajah, 2005). As English captured all the professional fields like science and technology, commerce, medicine, engineering and education, the need for effective teaching and learning of English has become inevitable in the global market. Effective English language skills are seen as vital for the workplace of countries which seek to participate actively in the global economy and want to have access to the information that form the basis of social, educational and economic development (Burns & Richards, 2009). English language has an important role in an individual’s life by uplifting their socio-economic status and thus become the mode to success and prosperity. This situation has become vital in non-English speaking countries with new dimensions.

Saudi Arabia is one such country where English and its teaching learning process play an integral part in its educational scenario and developments. Saudi Arabia which was established as a Kingdom in 1932 has seen 'unprecedented growth' in the fields of economy, health, science and technology in recent years (Rahman, 2011). Education field is also developing tremendously and along with it English has become a new horizon. The governments, law makers, administrators, teachers and students have understood the importance of English language and strenuous steps are taken to implement proficiency at every level of education. Nevertheless it’s trying to explore various challenges and subsequent remedies to achieve its goal.

Teachers’ perceptions towards teaching and Multiculturalism:

Gay (1994) visualizes that teachers often comprehend their values, beliefs and actions as the standard norms and it’s governed by educational principals of teaching. Due to misconception of ethnic, racial, social and linguistic diversity of students, teachers with or without their conscious exhibit practices unsuitable in the classroom.

Costa (1997) thinks that formal education depends upon the attitudes and professional preparedness of teachers.

Witsel (2003) emphasized that teaching and learning are not effortless task, even if students and teachers are of the same social and cultural background. Hence, it’s obvious that they face challenges in a Multicultural classroom. Therefore they should be imparted with professional development opportunities to enhance them to access several competencies and approaches.

To sum up Landsman & Lewis (2011) states that, the teachers who studies more about their students’ background, cultures and mother tongue, experience efficiency and comfortability in their work. Also they should implement various competencies and approaches to deal with these multicultural issues to impart proficiency in teaching second language.

Competencies in Teaching:

Today’s fast growing and globalized educational scenario, language learning transforms,
advances and fluctuates drastically to meet the requirements of the new generation and their career aspirations. To cope up with these innovations and adaptations each and every individual teacher should pursue different competencies.

Competencies are defined as “the set of knowledge, skills and experience necessary for future, which manifests in activities.”(Katane et.al.44). The three important competencies are field competency, pedagogical competency and cultural competency. Apart from these, teachers’ professional competencies are there which is diverged further into Curriculum competency, life-long learning competency, socio-cultural competency and Emotional competency.

Objectives:

At the outset of this proposed article, it will be clear that instead of focusing on the aspects of methodology it is also very important to understand the students’ need, their perceptions and problems which will facilitate success.

The objectives are:

1. To motivate the students’ to obtain basic language skills in LSRW and the values of multiculturalism.
2. To impart awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication.
3. To encourage and implement the cultural, economic and social issues of their learning environment.
4. To construct a parallelism between teaching, learning and assessment.
5. To generate effectively various approaches and methodologies to acquire efficiency.

Methodology:

This Paper broadly aims on both the qualitative and quantitative research methodology. It is the most common and popular approach about processes of teaching and learning. It focuses on how teachers use competencies to teach English skill-wise for Arab native speakers. The study has been also designed to investigate the students’ perceptions in learning the language. Further it also provides a descriptive approach of learning teaching process in a multicultural classroom.

Four methods are employed to caliber the students and teachers efficacy.


1. Questionnaires for Teachers.
2. Interviews for Students.
3. Interviews for Teachers.

1. Case Study – Periodical classroom assessments (LSRW)

Nearly 100 preparatory year students from 5 different colleges were selected randomly, i.e. 20 students from each college. As LSRW skills are very important, equal emphasis was executed while teaching them. In order to monitor the students’ language acquisition three assessments were conducted at equal intervals to study their progress on LSRW. The assessment comprises of:

Part I Reading Passage
1. Wh questions
2. Choose the correct option
3. True or False

Part II Writing
1. Punctuation
2. Sentence order
3. Paragraph writing on given topics

Part III Grammar
1. Forms of the Verb
2. Error deduction
3. Noun phrase

Part IV Listening
The students listen to the recordings and follow the instructions to complete the given task.
1. Open-ended questions
2. Contractions
3. Filling the gaps
4. Multiple choices.

2. Interview for Students:

It was an oral interview for 20 students from 5 different colleges. i.e. 4 students from each college volunteered to participate in the interview. They were instructed to express their own opinions and suggestions. The main focus was to interact with them and identify their problems and difficulties in learning English in a diverse learning environment and their ability to answer these questions with clarity, fluency, accuracy, tone and appropriate choice of language. The interview was recorded and analyzed later.

To sum up after analyzing the data’s carefully, most of the students were learning English for their career aspirations. As the part of Arabic school and its curriculum, English was only from the high school, despite they tried hard to cope up with the teacher and better understand
them in their college. Though their level of exposure to different language and culture was fair, their knowledge about the background of their classmates’ (Yemeni, Egyptian, Sudanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and Eritrean etc.) traditions, beliefs, values, customs, food habits and economic status was really good. Their clarity, fluency, accuracy, tones and appropriate choice of language was fair.

3. Questionnaires for Teachers:

Around 50 questionnaires were circulated to the language teaching staff of 5 different colleges i.e. 10 questionnaires for each college. Two days’ time was given to study, analyze and give their feedbacks. Only 30 questionnaires were submitted at the end of the second day. Each questionnaire was thoroughly and keenly analyzed for the feedback report.

4. Interview for Teachers:

This was an oral interview for the teachers. Nearly 10 staff was selected from 5 colleges i.e. 2 staff from each college. They were from different backgrounds, culture, tradition and customs (Indian, Saudi, Canadian, British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sudanese, Moroccan, Yemeni and Egyptian). The interview was for 5-10 minutes for each individual, and was conducted in two sessions. The responses were recorded and analyzed later for detailed summary and report.

After analyzing the various responses, it’s very clear that the teachers with or without experience, face more or less the same situation and scenario in teaching English for the Arab native speakers. Most of them felt that Communicative language teaching (CLT) approach was beneficial rather to direct method or community language learning. Regarding the strategies, 60 % of them supported Metacognition and authentic assessment to involve the students in learning process. Guided interaction and meaning – based context was considered only by 20% each. Finally, their opinion and suggestion regarding competency and multicultural values and beliefs was vague and so it’s summed up that the major role in teaching English depends on the individual teacher.

References:


