

Ethnographic Study of the Classroom in Comparison with the Objectives of the Curriculum: With Reference to ELT in Karnataka

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Abstract: *In the year 2007, the Government of Karnataka implemented the English as a second language from the first standard in Non - English Medium schools. My intention here is to draw upon my ethnographic fieldwork to make observations on what is happening inside the classrooms and to evaluate whether the teachers follow the procedure as stated in the resource books or not. If not I am interested in looking at what method or procedure they are following, and what impact these methods and procedures are having on the objectives envisioned at the introduction of the policy of teaching English as a language from the first standard. This article answers the main research question of the study, that is, to ascertain whether the teaching of English language at the first standard level is fulfilling "the objective/s" for which it was introduced or not. For this reason, I have carried out an ethnographic study of the actual class room teaching in the non - English medium schools. It also serves some of the objectives of my study: The ethnographic observation of classroom proceedings (the response of the pupils to the teaching of English language) is primarily done to see whether the goals envisioned by the policy makers are achieved or not.*

Keywords: Ethnographic, narration, resource books, activities books

1. Introduction

In the first phase of my survey during 2008 - 09, I observed 47 classes and in the next academic year 2009 - 10 which was carried out as part of the second phase of my fieldwork. Here, I visited the same 47 schools. The following analysis has been done on the basis of my ethnographic experience, notes and videotaped materials. Though the same set of learners in the subsequent standard in the concerned schools visited during the first phase formed the major part of my ethnographic fieldwork during the second phase carried out in 2009 - 10, the order of the schools visited might vary slightly. In the same way though the students remained the same, in most of the cases the same teacher was not there to handle the class.

With the brief description of the ethnographic fieldwork of two consecutive years of English classes, let me compare the practices of the classroom with that of the methods, that is, guidelines as given in the resource books for the teachers. I have taken up two segments of teaching English language namely narration of stories and recitation of rhymes.

Guidelines for the teachers as suggested in their resource books and the actual classroom practices

1) Narration of stories as given in the resource book

The main objective of the narration of stories is to develop skills of listening and speaking among learners. So, the syllabus committee gave the content related to the cited objective. There are 25 simple short stories for the I and II standard respectively; and 25 reading texts such as stories, paragraphs, poems, letters, dialogues each having 100 - 150 words length on different themes for the III and IV standard respectively. The stories included in the resource books are drawn from different sources such as ballads, epics,

panchatantra, fables, allegories, adventures, science fiction and detective stories etc. They are also from different cultures, broadly speaking; it contains stories set in India as well as foreign locations. Many of the stories are not commonly known. The assumption is that children need not listen to the same Kannada stories in English again. That is why unknown stories create some compulsion among the learners to listen to it in English. Guidelines are also given to the teachers in the Resource Books which can be summarized thus: teachers have to use the resource book to exercise his/her choice of content; they may take 25 - 30 days in the beginning of the academic year for narrating stories and help learners to do the activities; they are advised to move to the transaction of the course book only after completing the story narration as suggested; it is also mentioned in the book that there is no need to go about narrating stories in a linear order, a teacher can choose a story from among the 25 stories given for narration.

Keeping in mind the above suggestions the teacher has to select a story. Then, he/she should narrate the story as naturally as possible. There is no compulsion on the part of the teachers to use complete sentences while narrating the story, but they are advised to avoid repetition as much as possible. They are instructed to read the story to familiarize themselves with the sequence of events before narrating it. They are allowed to use the language given in the story to narrate if they are not sure of re - narrating it in their words. Before the second narration of a story, the teacher should inform the pupils where they will find pictures relating to the story in the activity book, so that the learners can observe the pictures while listening to the stories. A story which is seen to be interesting to the children when it is first told can usefully be told again in a later lesson. When the teacher revisits the story after some time gap that is for the third repeated narration they are advised to avoid using any

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teaching/learning materials as ultimately the learners must be in a position to follow the narration without any aid (DSERT, 2007: 12 - 14).

2) Teachers' practice in the classroom: Based on ethnographic fieldwork/video clippings

Most of the teachers used to select the stories according to the sequence that was given in the resource books. They were hesitant to jump the sequence. A few of the teachers refused to narrate the story during my field work, and many were hesitant. These teachers claimed that most of the stories were not familiar to them. According to the directions, they were free to choose any of the stories or they could narrate other stories with which they are familiar. But, they thought that the stories in the resource book are part of the prescribed syllabus which has to be followed religiously. Many teachers never asked the learners to refer to the activity book while narrating the stories while some of them advised the students to refer to the activity book during the time of the first narration itself. The use of TLM's was very less. The teachers tried to narrate the stories in learners' home language. They translated the stories into Kannada, Marathi, Urdu, Telugu and Tamil languages, which are medium of instructions in Karnataka. But, they were unable to translate them into the learners' home language such as Tulu, Konkani, Lambani, Soliga and other tribal languages, which are not the medium of instruction. I could observe that inter - semiotic translation was carried out in the English classrooms, where the English story was not only translated into the language of medium of instruction but also enacted by the teachers using their body. There was a huge gap between instructions given to the teachers in the resource book and the diverse practices employed by the teachers in their class room execution. However, they were trying their best to narrate them in their own style. It was reflected in the second year of my visit to the same schools. Some of them were using their resource books as textbooks and they used to read the stories before the learners. Some of the teachers at the time of interview told that they usually narrate the stories after teaching alphabet, words and sentences. Most of the teachers did not know that there are two steps while narrating the stories: 1. narrating the story in such a way that the learners listen to it, 2. narrating the story independently and asking the learners to refer to their activity book. But the teachers generally used the resource book as a textbook for the teachers and activity book as a textbook for the learners.

3) Rhymes and songs as given in the resource book

Let me outline here what the resource book has to say on Rhymes and songs being part of the curriculum. The main objective of reciting rhymes and songs is to develop the ability of listening to respond, repeat and express. To speak any new language, one needs to listen to it to familiarize themselves with its sounds and its rhythm before actually start learning. Teaching songs and rhymes helps the learners learn a language faster because they get exposure to different sounds of the language and enable them to practice a few sounds within a rhyme without being conscious of it. The use of imagery in the rhymes helps to stimulate learners' interest and imagination. They help them internalize the rhythm of the language and effortlessly stress words and use strong and weak forms. Learners have a natural inclination to learn songs and rhymes. They tend to

repeat words naturally. Since, it is part of their growing process; they can learn the language without inhibitions. The rhyme scheme helps them register the words easily making it possible for one to remember the rhymes for a long time. A lot of exposure to the new language is very essential before one actually starts speaking it. Rhymes and songs are the sources that provide exposure to the sounds and rhythm of the English language. In this regard, they have given the content related to the cited objective. 30 rhymes and songs are there for the first standard, 32 rhymes and songs for the second standard and selected poems for the third and fourth standard. The guidelines given to the teachers are like this: Learning has to be a fun. Learners should enjoy the experience of learning. Hence, it is not important to teach the rhymes line by line. It should be a natural process where learners automatically participate in the learning process. A few things to be kept in mind while using rhymes in the classroom are: the rhymes/songs need to be recited the first time, learners listen to the entire rhyme first followed by joining in the recitation, the teacher can use the tune with which he/she is comfortable with. They are supposed to follow the word stress marked in the text of the rhyme. After reciting the rhyme twice or thrice with the learners, the teacher could try reciting one line leaving out one word. The teacher could ask children to whisper or mime the rhymes before reciting aloud to generate interest and fun. Most rhymes are accompanied by the appropriate actions. There is no need to explain the meaning of each and every word. However if the learners want to know the meaning of some words they could be explained. The teacher has to recite the rhyme to the class with appropriate actions or gestures 2 or 3 times. He may say the rhyme part by part and get the whole class to repeat each part. The class may be divided into two halves. Each half says one part/line in chorus and other half continue with the next part. The teacher may select two learners to say the rhyme in pairs or pairs of lines in the form of a dialogue. The entire class may be divided into pairs or small groups and the rhyme may be recited in the same way within each pair or group (DSERT, 2007: 14 - 17).

Teachers' practice in the classroom: Based on ethnographic fieldwork/video clippings

The use of rhyming words, repetition of words and structures is necessary to help learners remember them. The regularity of sound, repetition of structures and words has an impact on the child's learning. In the classrooms, the teachers are following the right procedures of teaching rhymes. But some of them teach rhymes without dividing the learners into groups. Same tune is used for the all the rhymes. Not much importance is given to the stress of the words as stated in the resource book. The teachers ask learners to whisper or mime the rhymes before reciting aloud to generate interest and fun. Most rhymes are accompanied by the appropriate actions. Learners followed the actions simultaneously as the teacher recited the lines. Some of the teachers recite the rhymes without actions or gestures.

Outcome

Thus, with regard to the different segments of teaching English language, most of the teachers are not aware of the

procedure laid out in their resource books as well as taught in in - service trainings. From the data in the previous chapters I have shown that 71% of the teachers took in - service training in teaching of English from the first standard. Among them, 48% of teachers opined that the training was effective and 31% of them expressed that it was average.86% of the teachers told that they are following prescribed methodology in the classroom. But in the field, most of the teachers are not following the procedure related to the above story narration teaching strategy.

References

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