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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INCORPORATING TARGET CULTURE IN THE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM.

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Abstract

In this paper attempts have been made to point out that the curriculum should be so framed so that one may successfully negotiate the sometimes seemingly insurmountable gap between Language and Culture in the ELT Classroom.

The world today is a multicultural world. People today are working in large MNC's and having to interact as never before and that too in English. More and more speakers for whom English is not the mother tongue are finding it necessary to use the language. This has given rise to certain challenges and since language is often embedded in culture it is therefore imperative that one should explore the gap between language and culture.

So this would involve a paradigm shift away from the traditional models of language learning—to more innovative methods of teaching which would incorporate cultural elements. This will lead to overall communicative competence.

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Introduction:-

Need for a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in our Language Classrooms

The world today is a multicultural world. People today are working in large MNC's and having to interact as never before and that too in English. More and more speakers for whom English is not the mother tongue are finding it necessary to use the language. This has given rise to certain challenges and since language is often embedded in culture it is therefore imperative that one should explore the gap between 'language' and 'culture'.

Now what is 'language' and what is 'culture'? "Language" is the means of communication "Culture" at the simplest level has been defined "as the ways of a people" (Lado, 116). Language is often embedded in the culture itself. To understand a language fully one must understand the cultural implications and nuances. In this world of MNC's and mergers of global corporate giants, lack of proper understanding of the different cultural implications and biases might lead to a lot of misinterpretations amongst the English speakers belonging to different cultural backgrounds. . All these can adversely affect world trade, politics and more importantly between people to people interaction.

It is therefore imperative that in English Language Teaching (ELT) one should explore the dynamics between language and culture. In order to close the yawning gap between the Second Learner's Culture and the Target Language the curriculum too has to be more comprehensive. The teacher has to be the facilitator of student centric learning and has to take into account **the cultural base of language**. All this calls for a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in our language classrooms

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Some of the Major Real life problems regarding the teaching of English with reference to the different Cultural Contexts:

1. In the first place **cultural interference** might take place, when students learn another language because their behaviour might be influenced by their first cultural habits. One important factor in language learning is motivation. Students may often be frightened and even repulsed from learning a foreign language if it seems overpowering or if they feel themselves and their cultural background to be belittled. There is in popular parlance what is referred to as “coca-colonization”, while others speak of “McDonaldization” by foreign popular culture. So lack of proper interrelation between the culture of the learner and the new language which he is learning might be felt as a form of cultural dominance or even imperialism.
2. It is necessary to have properly trained ELT teachers. Many organizations seem to think that merely hiring native speakers of English would solve the problem. This too seems to be suggestive of “**political inequalities within ELT**” (Holliday385).
3. Another pressing problem is that there are certain basic differences in the languages and the cultures of people in different parts of the globe. Researchers like Laura Leets suggest that traditional Asians tend to favour ‘**high-context**’ messages. In such cases communicators are adept at recognizing hints and non-verbal cues. In American and European cultural groups however there might be more of using **unambiguous ‘low-context’ messages**.

During teaching and learning process or in the framing of the curriculum all these differences are not always kept in mind. Even educators and policy makers sometimes tend to believe that language is merely a code and you have just got to learn it. But in real life experience shows that it is not always possible to have one language fully translatable into another. There are so many symbols, idioms, colours and associations used in one culture which might be difficult to evoke with exactness in another language

How to incorporate Culture in the Language teaching Curriculum:

From the 1980’s, and especially in the 1990’s onwards with the rise in multi-cultural communities worldwide, and with the rise of global workforces more than ever before, there was greater and greater need for having ELT learning specially through “**culture laboratories**”.

Language teaching inputs like **literary pieces, memorabilia and pictures highlighting the cultural differences in body language and cultural practices might** make the learners aware of the points of similarity and differences between the learner’s and his target language.

The innovative teacher can use **posters, pictures of the target country**. In Modern Student Exchange Programmes there is scope for cultural exchanges so that ultimately the boundaries and barb wires dividing the countries, the languages spoken and the cultures upheld are blurred.

Literature:

Literary texts are often enough untapped resources of authentic language learning. . We get to know about the Victorian world, the manners and customs through the writing of the novelists. Again ,by reading Dickens’ novels like Oliver Twist and Great Expectations one can get a far better idea of the ills of child labour than anything else.

However, not only reading about English writers in the original or in translation, one can also read in English, the target language writings written by members of one’s own country. Ruskin Bond, for instance, one writer whom Indian students love to read since he writes about the rich experiences of a boy growing up in the hills of Dehradun, India. Again, one has the writings of author like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Amitabha Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri and even Kiran Desai who write about the experience of the Indian diaspora.

Films:

Films too can be a great help. One can make students watch films like Monsoon Wedding, Bend it Like Beckham or Bride and Prejudice(which is an adapted version of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice) which is about the Indian diaspora. These films act as a bridge between the Indian and foreign cultures.

Again a film like Shakespeare in Love can perhaps arouse the interest of an average student who is learning the foreign language more than all the learned criticism available on the bard.

Role Play:

It is important to incorporate **role-play in the syllabus for** gives the students the necessary confidence in acting out their future interactions with people of other cultures, it would also give them the practical experience and prepare them for even working in M.N.C's and prevent cultural shocks and help to adapt easier if they plan to go abroad.

The role playing activities would also help to widen the vistas of the student's mind, and realize that what one says may be embedded in one's cultural background. If there is a business meeting between someone from the eastern part of the world and the western part of the world, the former may seem very formal compared to the latter and vice versa. A Japanese executive for instance, might prefer to bow; someone from India or Bangladesh might go for a formal handshake, Namaste or Adab, whereas someone from America might choose to be hearty in his greetings.

Group discussions and debates in the classroom, can also help to create awareness and better understanding amongst the students.

While teaching about culture in our language classroom, we should also deal not only handling foreigners, but also tackle the invisible barriers and biases of gender, colour, caste, creed and race of our own multicultural communities. Through these discussions not only are leadership skills, communication skills, argumentative skills developed, the learner's get to know about the cultural components in language learning.

All the above resources if incorporated in the Language teaching classrooms would help in the following manner:

1. Promote a better understanding and awareness of both cultures.
2. Lead to a sense of enrichment and the realization that there is really no such thing as a 'superior' or 'inferior culture'.
3. There would be **Linguistic Competence**, as well as **Cultural Competence**, which intertwined together would lead to greater Communicative Competence.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion we may say that in today's world of 'global village' there is the need of a "paradigm shift" from the traditional models of language learning—to more updated, innovative and comprehensive modes of learning. The curriculum needs to be flexible, challenging and interesting enough to face the challenges of an ever-changing global multicultural world.

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