



DEVELOPING SKILLS OF GRAMMAR AND WRITING THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVISM

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ABSTRACT:

Learning English is still a challenging task for classroom teacher in English. As a skill based subject, the onus is on the teacher to impart knowledge in an interesting and interactive way. Developing writing skill among the students is very essential where knowledge of grammar forms an integral part. But instead of teaching grammar in a traditional way, Grammar should be taught in an innovative way. Constructivism is such an approach that encourages the learner to form grammatical concept from their everyday use. The aim of this paper is to establish the usefulness of constructive approach as an alternative method for imparting the skills of Grammar and Writing.



KEYWORDS: Constructivism, skills, Grammar, Writing.

INTRODUCTION :

English language learning in recent years has gained a new impetus. A growing trend is perceived to master the skills of this language. Moreover, the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s has coincided with an exploration in the demand for English in our school because English is perceived to open up new opportunities. To inculcate the skills of the language among the students rests on the teacher. But there is still a dearth of efficient teacher to impart such type of knowledge. Of the four skills (LSRW), two are receptive and the rest productive. While Listening and Reading belong to

the category of Receptive skills, the other two are considered as Productive skills. From Listening skills emerges Speaking skills and from Listening and Reading skills learners develop Writing skills. All the four skills have their respective sub -skills that help learners' acquisition of skills. For meaning communication, the role of Grammar has been a controversial issue. So, instead of teaching grammatical rules, emphasis should be placed on 'how to teach grammar'. General Grammar is best learnt when it grows from language in use rather than when it gets taught as a system of rules. The traditional notion of English

teaching was mainly on teacher centred instruction. There is no scope on student autonomy, encouraging student's movement and effective dialogue between students and teacher. In this context, NCF-2005 categorically says: traditionally English was taught by the Grammar Translation Method. With the introduction of Structurally Graded Syllabi in 1950, led to the fragmentation of thought by breaking up into structure and skills. The emphasis then shifted to teaching language use in meaningful context. The term communicative competence was introduced to signify one more dimension than the grammatical competence.

Meaningful language inputs can be best taught by the way of Constructivism. Constructivism presents a radically different view about the process of education, a new kind of pedagogy where emphasis will be more on students' activity than on teachers'. In a constructivist classroom with already formulated knowledge, ideas and understandings students come to know new situation. Care must be paid that language inputs must be appropriate to the learners' age and knowledge and readiness for language skills, given in variety and range of learning situation in his /her locality. These inputs must be provided at least in classroom but care also be made available to learners through a variety of innovations. The aim at the initial levels of learning English should be to build familiarity with the language in meaningful situation so that a child builds up a working knowledge of the language .In this context, it may be noted that learning process must inspire to go beyond the given text book .The emphasis should shift from masterly learning of the limited inputs to a regular exposure to a variety of meaningful inputs.

Constructivist teachers always encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them .By questioning themselves students in the classrooms ideally become 'expert learners' .So a well planned classroom environments helps the learner to master the art of 'how to learn'. Constructivism aims to make the learner free and independent while learning.

MEANING OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

The main proponents of constructivism were Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner who had an immense influence in the field of Educational Psychology .New modes of teaching –learning through 'co-operative learning', 'collaborative learning' and similar other processes have been introduced as a result of constructivism. So, constructivism implies a new kind of pedagogy where emphasis is more on what students do than on what teachers do. Constructivist philosophy insists on generating our own "rules" and "mental models", which we use to make sense of our experience. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND GRAMMAR

In the usual narrow sense of the term 'Grammar' evokes in us rather a negative image. It makes us scared of the rules, drills, exams and red marks on paper. Traditional grammar instruction teaches students grammar separately from their writing. When learning grammar, an individual can then "talk about language..... understand what makes sentences and paragraphs interesting and precise..... and has a tool for thinking about how discussing sentences" (Haussamen et al, 1998). Unfortunately, Mulroy (2004) points out, students who do not understand grammar "lack any method for analysing meaning", if a student cannot decipher meaning he/she certainly cannot reproduce meaning (p.53).Because NCTE, in addition to other scholar, have deemed grammar important, the focus should not be on whether or not to teach grammar, but, instead, the focus should be on how best to teach these concepts. The NCTE has also articulated a resolution on traditional grammar instruction based on 50 years of research: "Resolved that the National Council of Teacher Education (1985) affirms that the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises is a deterrent to the improvement of students' speaking and writing" (para-1). That is why an alternative method should be adopted in the process of teaching grammar. Constructivism is that method which offers a radically different view about the process of education. It aims to teach grammar inductively. In order to use constructivist methodology in grammar class students may be motivated to construct their own concepts about use of grammar in language use found in their own context. It must be noted that while learners form their own concepts they may commit errors but negative criticism should be avoided. Teacher may give more clues to direct them to the expected response. Use of passive may be used to draw learner's attention and help using them form concept of using passive in English language and he/ she may resort to the following steps:

STEP-1

The teacher forms groups of five/six and presents them with a set of sentences that they often come across in their daily life .The sentences are:

1. Mobile is not allowed in the examination hall.
2. Passengers are requested to get down from the train safely.
3. Tea is prepared from the tea leaves.
4. Blowing horn is prohibited near the hospital.
5. Students are not allowed in the school after the prayer.

Now the teacher asks the students to find out what are common in all these structures and also notice the verb form, position of 'doers' and object in the sentences. The teacher acts as a facilitator and encourages learner's group discussion and supplies clues where necessary. The teacher may enquire about the students if they come across such sentences before and where.

STEP-2

Teacher gives another set of sentences to the groups and give the same instruction as in step one.

1. The examination authority do not allow mobile in the examination hall.
2. Railway authority requests the passengers to get down from the train safely.
3. Mother prepares tea from tea leaves.
4. Hospital authority prohibits blowing horn near the hospital.
5. The headmaster does not allow the students in the school after the prayer.

STEP-3

Teacher now writes the rules of making a sentence passive on the blackboard and then gives another set of sentences to identify whether they are in active or passive.

1. This bag is made of jute.
2. These seats are reserved for ladies.
3. Virat Kohli scored two hundred runs in last cricket match.
4. Library books must be refunded before due date.
5. Raja makes kites from paper.
6. Rani reads in class vi.

STEP-4

Lastly, teacher imparts few sentences asking students the students to change the voice by using the concept they already learnt. Learners work in group and then answer.

1. We invite applications for the post.
2. The students are warned by the headmaster.
3. The teacher teaches English.
4. Students draw picture for a 'sit and draw' competition.

Similarly 'Writing Skills' can be developed through constructive approach. At first, the forms different groups and they are allowed to perform conversation acting from their text. When all groups have performed, the may ask the students to come up with their own innovative analysis. Next, the students will be inspired to speak about that familiar topic which they come across regularly in their life. The teacher should play a very important role here because his inspiration would initiate the students to go for newer ideas. Now the students will be told to write one conversation from any idea-one from each group. These steps would enable the students to think beyond the already-given-way. By this way the students will be adopted to constructivist approach. Their reading of the given text would enhance 'Reading' skill and enactment of the conversation would nourish 'Listening' and 'Speaking' skill. At the end of writing of new conversation from each group and many more as home work would surely add power to 'Writing' skill. So, all four skills (LSRW) would be developed as a final outcome.

CONCLUSIONS

Repetitive practice, drills and memorisation are some of the trademarks of traditional approach where teacher plays a supreme role. English, being an official language, enjoys a high position in our society. So the language has to be taught in different manner. Teacher should leave the traditional method and adopts innovative strategies such as cooperative learning, collaborative learning. Constructivism is such an approach which allows the students a novel way of thinking by correlating their previous knowledge. Therefore, for teaching in an effective way, Constructivism approach has become an indispensable means for teachers to tackle the English classroom efficiently.

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