

**ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS: EXPLORING INNOVATIVE
METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM
(A STUDY INTO CLASSROOM DYNAMICS)**

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ABSTRACT. Newspapers are considered as one of the most powerful sources of sharing information and enriching knowledge bank. The basic reason of selecting English newspapers as a teaching tool is very pragmatic as English newspapers cover an array of information and knowledge and that too within the reach of our students' wallet. The English Newspapers can be used as an efficacious teaching tool to improve the language skills of the students. The use of English Newspapers will certainly encourage and motivate the students and help them to sharpen their LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) skills. The present paper aims to study issues that are interwoven with teaching English through English newspaper in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: *Newspapers, teaching tools, LSRW skills, role-play, interactive Activities etc.*

Introduction

The newspapers are regarded one of the most reliable, easily available, less expensive and effective sources of sharing information and knowledge. The newspapers offer us a wide range of knowledge and in-depth analysis of incidents and events. Generally, people prefer to read out the newspapers along with their morning cup of tea or breakfast. The newspapers are published in various languages with a great number of supplements and editions. In country like India, as per the latest statistics available, the country consumed around 100 million copies of newspapers that have made it the second largest market in the world. As India is a country of great diversity and here we have various sects, religions and languages. So we have a large pool of International/National/Regional/Local newspapers. The reputation of any newspaper largely depends upon its circulation, number of editions, printed copies, number of readers, coverage and scope. Even after the advent of electronic media, importance and readership of newspapers are stable and it is quite striking to mention here that there is a great increase in the readership of all the leading newspapers. Reading newspapers on regular basis is considered a good habit. It is

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observed that the students those who read newspapers regularly are more proficient and aware about the happenings that occur near or far away world. By reading newspapers, the students can gather information on varied subjects including social-political-business issues, sports, entertainment, art, culture, music, education etc. Moreover, the practice of using English newspapers helps the students in the ESL classroom and in the mundane affairs of their life. They can also be encouraged to improve their vocabulary, grammar and thinking skills as regular reading of newspapers can provide them an opportunity to express and exchange their ideas on a wide variety of issues.

Historical Perspective

In an ESL classroom, English newspapers can be used as a very effective teaching tool. Fenholt (1985) offers numerous activities that are based upon the use of newspapers as a learning resource to enhance reading and life skills of the students. Carolyn Hunter and Janice Mc Nearney (1988) have developed a series of 12 lessons that use the newspapers in an adult basic education curriculum. Each lesson focuses on a particular letter of the alphabet and provides a list of vocabulary items required for the lesson along with hints on how to impart them in the classroom and suggested activities. According to Chandler (1988) Newspaper like '*the Tulsa*' would also introduce a special programme for adult "Read Up" that combined use of daily newspapers with a telephone hotline to facilitate the students to improve reading skills. Monda, Vail and Koorland (1988) highlighted that the newspapers can be very potentials for the LD (Learning Disabled) institutions to build an individualized institutional programme. Howden (1990) stated that the "Palm Beach Post" in Florida offered a workplace literacy programme with six classes in three different programmes viz Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language and High school Equivalency in preparation of a Diploma Programme. Learning Disabled (LD) students can also be benefited by using newspapers in the classroom. Many practitioners (Chavira, 1990; Hess, 1987; Salas-Isnardi, n.d.; Toben, 1987) have compiled detailed and level-appropriate lists of classroom activities for using the newspaper as text. Kenji Kitao (1995) suggested a number of activities pertaining to teaching of English Language. Paul Sanderson (2002) stated that a very important thing that enhances success in using newspapers in the classroom is the careful design of *tasks*. "Grade the task – not the material' is a well-known maxim in language teaching'. Asahi, (2003) and Asahi (2004) both give practice in finding information in vocabulary-glossed leads and in short news articles. Lindsay Clandfield and Duncan Foord (2006) stated that newspapers are much more current than course-books, they make an excellent springboard for lessons, and they feature different types of language (narratives, stories, letters, advertising, reports, etc.). Vilma Tafani (2009) analyzes the importance of using mass media in the classroom and finds the ways on using printing and audio-visual media.

Why to Use English Newspapers in an ESL Classroom?

The use of Newspapers in the classroom on regular basis will inculcate habit of intensive and extensive reading. In India, Newspapers like "*The Hindu*", "*The Times of India*" etc are very popular among the learners of English Language as they have a special column/feature to sharpen the English Language Skills of the readers. English newspapers are also less expensive and full of varied information and details. Anybody can afford them easily. In urban area that too in metro and semi-metro cities, readers prefer to read English newspapers. The students those who are living in such places, fond of reading English newspapers in comparison to the students of country side. The circulation of English newspapers in country side is not regular due various reasons. It is also seen that newspapers arrive one or two day late after its publication. But still, for the sake of sharing the information and improving English Language, it can be used as a learning resource. Following are the main advantages of using English newspapers in an ESL classroom:

1. Provide motivation for reading and discussion in English
2. Develop affection and interest towards the use of English Language.
3. Make the process of learning interesting and innovative.
4. Flexible and adaptable to all curriculum areas and grade levels.
5. Promote good reading habits that will help in a better understanding.
6. Offer a wide variety of knowledge and information -- news, sports, weather, editorials, and comics.
7. A very cost-effective way to impart learning.
8. Contain practical vocabulary and the best models of clear, concise writing.
9. Develop writing, speaking and listening skills of the students.
10. Explore and unfold the world of knowledge and information.
11. Lessons take time to prepare. Once a teacher finds an interesting material, he/she may use it over and over again.
12. Helpful in learning grammatical usages, carefully crafted sentence structures and idioms and phrases besides new words.

The English Newspapers can be used for ESL learners of all levels. For beginning students, the large-print headlines, recognizable symbols and numbers, and many color and black-and-white photographs can communicate information that students understand. At an intermediate level, the newspaper offers exposure to print, to graphic devices, and to punctuation. Advanced students can read English newspapers much as a native speaker would, skimming some articles, reading others completely, and ignoring those parts of the newspaper of small interest to them. The English newspapers report the current international events, new important technological breakthroughs, the changing world and society. It's clear that the newspapers follow the time closely and the contents are new and attractive. In this way,

they can always keep students motivated and up-to-date. The English newspapers present English learners a wide variety of writing written in authentic language. Different kinds of texts such as narratives, stories, letters, reports, and advertisements, etc, can serve as examples of writing and be made use of to hone students' writing ability. Further, the English newspapers provide various materials for students to broaden their knowledge. Through reading one can come across with foreign cultures, foreigners' value of life, ways of thinking, belief, behaviors and life trend better.

Language is a powerful means of communication. Through reading of English newspapers, students discover life as it happens. With the development of the language ability, students' consciousness of social accountability, cultural backdrop and critical thinking are also developed to a great extent.

How to Develop Habit of Reading English Newspapers amongst the Students

A daily reading of an English newspaper would do a world of good to students and bring about a genuine affection for the language. The practice of using Newspapers does not only help the students in the ESL classroom. A teacher has to be very innovative in organizing various interactive exercises based upon English newspapers. In Indian context, it is very imperative for an English teacher to remove the students' fear of learning English language and to guide them to use the English newspapers judiciously. Following measures can be applied as to develop habit of reading English newspapers among the students:

1. Motivate the students to read at least one English newspaper on regular basis for a month or two.
2. Ask the students to select the most interesting part of the newspaper that appeals them. They can read it and report back to other classmates.
3. Encourage the students to read outside class as much as possible.
4. Help the students to become better learners. Reading is a great way of acquiring language. It will be very handy in developing their reading skills, writing skills, and vocabulary.
5. Talk about reading and comprehension of English texts with your learners as well, and share strategies that they can use when reading.
6. Encourage the students to keep and refer an authentic dictionary while reading the newspaper. At the initial stages, the students can be asked to understand the meanings of hard/new words with the help of context so that flow and interest during reading can be maintained.
7. Try to encourage the students to comprehend the story/feature/article as a whole. They should be made enable to have their focus on getting a complete picture rather than getting stuck with the parts that they do not understand at ease.

8. Encourage the students to pen down the details/information that are relevant and useful for them as it will enable them to develop writing notes/précis/ essays/paragraphs/ summary etc.

What Do English Newspapers Contain for ESL Classroom Exercises?

With the recent development of print and electronic media, the contents of newspapers have become rich and vivid and the newspaper language at the same time has become more trendy, vivacious and realistic. Some newspapers are easy to read, easy to use. The dedicated teachers can plan exercises to build up reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary, map/chart reading skills, geography skills and social study skills. As a matter of fact, the English Newspapers contain a wide range of information like feature stories, business news, sports news, special columns, reviews, notices, advertisements, editorials, entertainment schedules etc. A learner can easily pick up the reading material(s) of his/her interest. Following are the main ingredients of the English Newspapers:

1. News Stories:

The front page is considered as the mirror of any newspaper. It contains all the breaking or important news in it. The headlines of the front page are prepared meticulously with an aim to draw the attention of the readers.

2. Feature Stories:

Feature stories are very helpful in sharing information on the topics of reader's interest. These stories may be based upon a trend, event, situation etc.

3. Special Features:

Special features are meant to have a healthy discussion on a specific issue or a special case/event/story.

4. Editorial and Letters to the Editor:

Editorial columns reflect the views of the editor/ editorial team/guest writer. Editorial columns are considered very insightful and thought provoking ones. They help the readers to build up their thoughts and views and promote a high level of thinking skills. The Letters to the Editors represent the opinions of the readers. It is helpful in bringing out the views of the readers before other readers.

5. Advertisements/Classified:

The advertisements/classified items are very helpful for the readers to know more about an existing or a newly launched product(s).

6. Miscellaneous Items:

In a newspaper, the readers can easily find time table of Trains/Flights, schedule of events, television, theatre, movies etc. we can also get useful information on weather, fashion, share-market, trade and business etc.

ESL Class-Room Activities Through the Use of English Newspapers

Newspapers are also a great source for ESL teachers. They can be used as teaching materials to develop students' language skills. They can be used effectively with a wide range of levels from Elementary to higher. The ESL teachers should be careful to organize a certain activity using them.

At the Beginners Level

- ❖ Ask the students to cut out pictures of things they like in the newspaper and then write sentences about the pictures.
- ❖ Encourage the students to read aloud a few news items from the page of their interest and ask them to write them down.
- ❖ Try to use pictures found in the newspaper and tell the students to write sentences about the pictures using prepositions to describe the spatial relationships.

At the Intermediate Level

- ❖ Advise the students to circle words that they do not comprehend and ask them to figure out the meaning from the situation and explore the definition in the dictionary.
- ❖ Try to cut out headlines from various articles and match headlines with stories.
- ❖ Ask the students to analyze advertisements. Students may report their findings by writing a paragraph.

At the Advanced Level

- ❖ Form groups to write letters to the editor.
- ❖ Ask the students to follow a news item over a period of time and discuss the events that occur.
- ❖ Encourage the students to read an article that describes a problem and discuss the problem's cause and effects.

Miscellaneous Classroom Activities

Exploring the Meaning:

Remove the headlines from a number of news stories. Display the headline-less stories on a classroom bulletin board. Provide students with the headlines, and ask them to match each to one of the stories.

The students can be asked to locate following in an English newspaper:

- ❖ A simple present tense verb representing a simple past action e.g. India wins the match.
- ❖ Omission of 'and, a 'be' verb or an article e.g. U.S- India sign a historic treaty.

- ❖ Omission of the verb in representing Present Continuous Tense e. g. India Retail Market blooming.
- ❖ 'to' with verb representing future tense. e.g. The Mongolian Prime Minister to visit India.
- ❖ Abbreviations. e.g. SEBI cuts down the exchange rate. (Security Exchange Board of India)
- ❖ A participle form used for passive voice e.g. Man of the Match Trophy given to Dhoni.

Enrich Vocabulary:

Assign each student a letter of the alphabet. Request students to look through the newspaper, find five unfamiliar words beginning with the assigned letter, and look up the definition of each. Ask students to look in the newspaper for any of the following:

- ❖ words with a particular suffix or prefix
- ❖ words containing a particular vowel sound or consonant blend
- ❖ compound words
- ❖ words in the past, present, and future tenses
- ❖ possessives
- ❖ plurals

Role Play Activity:

Distribute the English Newspapers, one for each group of two or three students. Tell the students that they have a time limit with which to skim through the newspaper. When the scheduled time is over, ask two groups to get together and report to each other everything they remember that is in the news. They must do this in English and cannot refer to the newspapers.

Speaking Activities:

Ask the students to cut out some photographs from the newspaper of recent news items which are familiar/relevant/of interest to them. Ask them to do the following:

- ❖ Describe what is in the picture
- ❖ Speculate about what the news story could be .

Sharpening Writing Skills:

Ask the students to read some of the letters and discuss in pairs which ones they find most interesting/controversial/easy to understand. Letters in the letter to the editor section can ignite discussion. Afterwards ask the students to write their own letter to the editor. They must write between 25 and 75 words.

Group Discussion:

Identify an issue discussed in the newspaper. Ask the students research the issue by reading all relevant articles, editorials, letters and opinions. Encourage the students to write a paragraph on the topic, voicing an opinion that is supported by detailed facts.

Conclusion

Technology enabled English Language learning tools are only available in some schools, It is quite imperative for a ESL teacher to use resources which are readily available to them, including English newspapers. In planning a lesson using a newspaper, the teacher should take into consideration the length of the article, paragraph, the complexity of the language, the density of information, the subject-matter and content, the time available and the level of the students (Tafari 2009). This is high time that scholars must work out a strategy on developing a new teaching model about using the English newspapers as an effective tool to improve English as a language. Hence, the students are expected to be trained in such a manner so that they can be able to read the English newspapers in an organized manner and avail the optimal mileage to hone their English language skills.

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