

Language Across the Curriculum: Implications and Challenges

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Abstract

Language helps an individual to grow and adjust in the society as it is the expression of the culture. Language learning is a complex process and involves the development of four skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. In order to make this process of learning fruitful and encouraging for the child, certain level of motivation and involvement are the prerequisites.

Learners must feel the need and grit to do any academic activity which is possible only when all the stakeholders make conscious efforts to make the learning process child centric and spontaneous. Language Across the Curriculum is a modern approach that emphasizes the role of language as a tool for learning other subjects and subject teaching as opportunities to substantiate linguistic competencies. Language plays an integral role in comprehension and in construction of new knowledge. Teachers can help to create ideal learning situations for learners by integrating learning of various subjects. The present paper attempts to highlight the importance of Language Across the Curriculum approach in the contemporary situation to promote learning.

Key Words: Linguistic competencies, Language Across the Curriculum approach, collaborative efforts.

Introduction

Language is the medium to express our thoughts and ideas. It is language through which teachers are able to convey ideas to students and learners are able to express their learning level. Language plays an important role in the teaching learning process. Language not only enables us to express our thoughts and beliefs but also acts as a tool for learning and an effective agent to enhance understanding. The concept of language across the curriculum believes that language and learning cannot take place in segregated compartments as they are interrelated so this approach mainly focuses on constructive and active learning of language which helps to develop learners mental and linguistic capacities. Effectiveness of language across the curriculum approach is supported by various research findings in cognitive science, linguistic and language pedagogy as well as in educational psychology. The findings can be summarized below-

- Language is not just communication skills it is much more comprehensive than speaking and writing abilities.
- Language acquisition involves thinking process and language is used in thinking processes.
- Language acts as an effective tool for conceptualizing and linking information with existing knowledge.
- Language promotes subject learning by supporting mental activities, precise cognition which is needed for better understanding of subjects.
- As language bridges the gap between cognitive abilities and practical approach that enables one to apply mental abilities in solving subject specific problems
- Language across curriculum approach helps young learners to understand the importance of language within and outside teaching learning process, to perform it effectively in various spheres of life.

Role of language in Education

Vygotsky (1978) was of the view that children can be trained to solve practical problems by using their speech, hands and eyes. The reason for this statement was further elaborated by him as he called speech the extension of an

individual's intelligence and cognition. Eyes, hands and speech together constitute a way for one to interact with his/her surroundings not only in terms of physical domains but beyond tangible limitations. He also advocated that higher level of understanding or say development helps learners to comprehend the immediate and to evaluate abstract ideas before they are tangibly employed to perform an act. He stated that language plays an important role in developing these higher levels as it is only through language that we are able to indulge in social interactions, allow and involve in superior forms of activities which lead to cognitive development through social interaction. Language sustains and promotes this social interaction distinguishing humans from others creatures or animals.

The ability of an individual to use language as a tool to solve problems, to use it as the tool to understand one's surroundings play can be nurtured by conscious efforts. Spencer(1988) believed that the potential of a child must be measured by his/ her capacity to get profited from others experiences and expertise and not merely in terms of what the child already knows or understands. He was of the view that language acts as a tool for learning as well as an aid to understanding. Vygotsky (1978) advocated the role of language as a strong tool with powerful developmental role because language enables one to express, understand and benefit from surroundings around us. Language development is pre requisite for acquisition of knowledge and is like vehicle for educational development. He used the term Zone of Proximal Displacement to highlight the importance of social interaction and co-operation in the process of learning. He called it an integral feature for learning as social interaction, co-operation, sharing ideas and thoughts lead to scaffolding resulting in better understanding and comprehension. In the recent years a number of psychological and educational researches have understood and highlighted the role of language in overall learning, classroom interaction, getting benefits from the experiences of fellow learners and on holistic development of an individual. This interdependence of language and knowledge on each other resulted in the emergence of an innovative pedagogical practice called Language Across the Curriculum.

Language Across the Curriculum(LAC)

Language Across the Curriculum(LAC) as a new pedagogical concept highlights the fact that language learning cannot be confined to subject specific learning that is to say it is not reserved for mother tongue, second language learning, foreign language learning. Language learning and subject specific learning simultaneously enrich each other. In order to make teaching learning more effective and holistic, linguistic skills should be integrated with subject specific teaching. We have to understand the comprehensive need of integrating language learning with all subjects in order to share various mental faculties of the learners. There is linguistic dimension in each and every learning situation; therefore we cannot underestimate importance of language learning in school education. Language Across the Curriculum (LAC)is a systematic extension of language education into subject specific, interdisciplinary model of learning. Helping the learners to attain better conceptual clarity as well as facilitate them to acquire linguistic capabilities. It is based on the principle that language is developed mainly through its powerful,purposeful use. The underlying assumptions behind this approach are stated below:

- Language learning involves development of basic skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing it means it is reaction to perceptions.
- Language learning is pre requisite for cognitive and intellectual development.

Language is one of the ways for facilitating learning, for improving learning and for reflection of learning so language and subject learning cannot be segregated.

According to Language across the Curriculum (LAC) approach, language learning should occur at different levels in the teaching-learning process. It means language acquisition can take place by two ways -

1. Teaching language in the classroom as a subject
2. Integrating language teaching with other subjects in the same classroom.

Language across the Curriculum (LAC) emphasizes the need of applying knowledge of any language beyond that language learning classroom. This approach stresses the need of integrating language learning with content learning of other subjects. The concept behind language across the curriculum is that language acquisition cannot take place in language classroom only. Language acquisition becomes effective when it is integrated with content learning of other subjects.

The contemporary education demands Language across the Curriculum (LAC) approach for better understanding of content. It focuses on making language acquisition and subject learning go simultaneously by learning different meanings, integrating different subjects with each other and making language an effective way to facilitate better understanding of subjects. Subject knowledge and linguistic capabilities are directly related to each other and facilitate each other. Having good vocabulary , ability to organize and express ideas and concepts helps one to get

better subject specific knowledge. The application and practice of interlinking language learning with content learning is the basis foundation of LAC.

The concept of LAC affirms that language and thinking are implicitly interconnected. This concept is based on the fact that learning is fruitful and permanent when learners are constructive and active during the learning process. It believes that learners are potentially autonomous and they are capable of assimilating new concepts by utilizing their linguistic experiences . Learners can explain and manifest interpretations in various subjects, can enhance and construct their knowledge of concepts as well as understanding the ways/manners in which language is used in various subjects. Therefore as a facilitator all teachers should be motivated to facilitate students in enhancing their linguistic skills and capabilities while learning any school subject.

Benefits of language across the curriculum approach

Language across curriculum approach is appreciated and promoted by most of the educationists. The reason for its popularity is its advantages for students, teachers as well as for the entire education system. Here are some of the benefits of language across the curriculum approach.

- It helps learners to get understanding of different technical terms related to subject specific concepts.
- It helps learners to improve their linguistic skills by linking them with content knowledge.
- It enables learners to discuss subject concepts more effectively through language teaching.
- It helps the learners to understand the relationship between linguistic proficiency and expertise in core subjects.
- It motivates students to understand the world around them by providing them opportunities to explore, express and interrelate language learning with subject content.
- It stimulates linguistic skills learning through activity as learners get the opportunity to practise linguistic skills while learning different subject concepts .
- It ensures holistic development of learners as they are able to understand the importance of language and subject learning and importance of technical vocabulary to improve linguistic skills.

Challenges

The research studies have proved the benefits of LAC approach and various efforts are being made to integrate language learning go simultaneously with subject learning. But still the journey is not smooth and we have a long way to go and overcome the obstacles that are hampering the consonance of language learning and subject knowledge. Dewey and Duff (2009) have tried to explain that through four reasons or say primary concerns:

- Lack of organizations or information on how to integrate language learning with subject knowledge – According to this factor most of the organizations are not updated about the practical feasibilities of applying and adopting this practice. They believe in segregation and that is why opting for separate approached to teach language and content in isolated compartments. Due to lack of orientation or say training they are opting traditional pedagogical practices.
- Lack of funding for initiatives: Linking and integrating language with core subjects need planning and organizing curricular and other activities. In their study Dewey and Duff found that most of the organizations try to avoid this because they feel that organizing pedagogical situation to integrate language and core subjects will demand extra from them. This restricts many organizations to try and opt LAC.
- Problematic administrative policies: Dewey and Duff(2009) also found the role of strict and rigid administrative policies as a hindrance in implementing LAC. While mentioning about this factors they stated that lack of administrative flexibility like linking curriculum of language with core subjects, changes in the timings , physical constraints to implement LAC are some of the reasons to hinder implementation of this approach.
- Lack of support staff for carrying out initiatives is also one of the factors due to which LAC approach cannot be used. Due to lack of co-operation and collaboration , lack of communication the academic staff does not get support to organize teaching learning situations to integrate language learning with other subjects.

Apart from the factors mentioned before there are other reasons as found by Dewey and Duff (2009) like:

- Lack of readiness or preparedness among faculty members to integrate language with subject knowledge.
- Due to lack of proper orientation and facilitation few faculty members also stated that they did not find any consonance or alignment in the principles of teaching language and core subjects.

It should be kept in mind that the actual outcomes of language learning in any class need to analyzed empirically. In fact these learning outcomes in one way or the other are dependent on the content which is used to teach them. This content should not be extremely general or remote from subject related topics or objectives. If it is not done the chances of transferability of linguistic skills with subject concepts becomes extremely negligible. Conceptual understanding and subject specific comprehension don't develop on their own but require certain level of language competences, goal oriented practices, continuous attention and sustained motivation and collaboration.

Conclusion

LAC can be taken as academic experiences to help students get opportunity to utilize and enrich their linguistic skills in core subjects. It aims to infuse subject knowledge with language skills. It is the inclusion of relevant and authentic language learning material to substantiate course perspectives and understanding to prepare students to meet the demands of multilingual and cross-cultural global society.

Learners need to be trained to use language in such a differential and explicit way that they are able to overcome challenges and obstacles of content learning. There is no denial of the fact that many obstacles and influential factors like absence of central agent or say responsibility taking authority, lack of orientation, lack of expertise, attitude of language / subject teachers, absence of proper monitoring and facilitating agency, lack of linkage are making it a difficult process but we need to set and decide our realistic goal, work for the same with optimum dedication and need to develop a curriculum which is based on integrated learning outcomes. The focus of such curriculum should be specific skills and competences, clear mention of tasks and statement of outcomes assigned to particular subject and certain level of performance as outcome of the whole learning process.

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