

EXPLORING TEACHER IN ACTION: ACTION RESEARCH IN REMEDIAL ENGLISH TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SINDH

Inayat Ali

Lecturer in English, Isra University, Hyderabad, Sindh

inayat.ali@isra.edu.pk

Anum Hussain

English Lecturer, Government College University, Hyderabad

anum.hussain@gcu.edu.pk

Tahreem Akhter (Corresponding Author)

English Lecturer, Isra University, Hyderabad, Sindh

tahreem.akhtar@isra.edu.pk

Abstract

Remedial English serves as a bridge to build confidence and self-efficacy among many graduate students at University of Sindh. English language is more than a language i.e., more than a medium of communication. It becomes the egress for Pakistani graduate learners. English serves as Second and official language of Pakistan.

The study explores the live experience of both teacher and student connection at the University of Sindh by integrating Piaget (1950) and Burner (1966) theory. According to them, learning is an active process. The study aims to uncover the challenges in ESL teaching journey for teachers and students including the large classrooms and resources unavailability. The study further explores how several factors, i.e., teaching strategies, and classroom environment help to shape students' motivation towards ESL learning. The study emphasizes the ESL active learning based on cognitive development among Graduate learners. It is drawn from Piaget constructivist learning theory.

The study recommends that teachers must structure their teaching by lesson planning before the class is conducted. Along with it, they integrate interactive methods for nurturing a learning environment. The steps significantly advance foster students' active engagement in the class. It also fosters a learning space where students can actively develop their competence. Remedial Education can become a transformative experience for ESL graduate students in Sindh University. The research fills the gaps of practical recommendation of active learning for creating an inclusive and effective remedial English teaching framework.

Key Terms: Action Research, Remedial English Teaching, Teaching Strategies, Constructivist language learning theory, And Student Engagement.

Introduction

The study is based on one of the observations of remedial classes in Information technology (IT department). This study explores the teaching strategies, classroom environment including class dynamics, and students' active engagement i.e., university graduate students' responses. The study aims to identify effective teaching methods for active learning in ESL classrooms. It bridges the remedial class as a resource for developing self-efficacy among students. The study emphasizes that teaching a second language i.e., English in Pakistan should be inculcated with task-based learning for students' active involvement/engagement. The learning outcome in the form of Reflection after students' responses is also part of the study.

The study is based on:

1. How do teaching strategies influence students' engagement in remedial classes?
2. What are the challenges for students in remedial English classrooms?

Overview of Remedial English Classes in University of Sindh

The Remedial English Classes were introduced in 2002 at the University of Sindh, shifting its interest towards a student-centered approach. The courses were designed for graduate students as a basic opportunity to improve their English (Burrito & Soomro, 2013). According to them, these courses are offered to graduate students so that they can be brought to a certain level of proficiency in English. According to Arman (2011), it is a course for the students to achieve proficiency in a Second language.

Remedial Education is mandatory for universities to build students' competency (Luoch, 2014). It was started based on the vision that students' active involvement can be inculcated in practical language learning at Sindh University. Before 2002, the literature was integrated through remedial English classes. The syllabuses were revised and now the Oxford series book of "English for Graduates" written by Howe et al. (1997) is taught. The previous book does not fulfill the needs analysis of the students (Solangi, 2008).

Literature Review

Systematic management is always required for effective ESL language teaching. For this, teachers need to strategically plan for students' engagement. Borko (2004) emphasizes time management and continuous clarification for pedagogical development in classrooms. Fisherman et al. (2003) emphasize enhancing teachers' teaching development such as professional training. Several studies on the Pedagogical system of Pakistan emphasize the teachers' quality of instruction. One of the studies by Nadeem et al. (2018) assessed the quality of education of English teachers at the secondary level in Punjab, Pakistan. Their study investigates the quality of English language teachers. They have conducted 545 surveys from prospective English teachers and 31 from In-service English teachers. Their study outcomes reveal that there is a satisfactory quality of teachers in Punjab province. To some extent, classroom teaching needs to improve. However, the situation is not similar in Sind province even in Government universities. Sahito Zulfiqar et al. (2017) conducted a case study based on Challenges faced by Graduate students at Sindh University in remedial English classes.

He highlighted the following challenges for Sindh University Students in remedial classes.

1. Students struggle with basic English skills. It does not allow their ability to succeed in remedial classes.
2. Teachers often come bare hands. The unavailability of lesson plans and teachers' resources hinders active learning and students' engagement during remedial English classes.
3. Students lack self-efficacy and cannot come out of their shyness. Teachers may be shortcomings in their knowledge and teaching approaches.
4. Students come from different educational backgrounds, i.e., public and private colleges. This leads to disparity and ability gaps in remedial classrooms.
5. Students are provided insufficient opportunities to practice their language skills.

The studies propose a comprehensive understanding of the need for quality teaching plans and approaches. However, the studies fail to provide authentic solutions to improve active learning in remedial English classrooms. Traditional teaching methods often limit the students' capabilities. Therefore, we need to inculcate task-based learning approaches in classes. This research fills the gaps. The study proposes solutions such as remedial English teachers must

prioritize student engagement, interactive teaching strategies, and real-world applications. This is grounded in Piaget's (1950) theory of constructivism. The theory explores how learners construct their knowledge and understanding when they experience and interact. Recent studies, such as those by Duffy & Cunningham (2011), highlight that interactive, student-centered approaches foster deeper cognitive development.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the set of priorities used by teachers in classrooms. It is also an organized management activity. In strategic planning, teachers bring all their energy and resources to strengthen students' cognition. Strategic management is the process of building capabilities that allow a firm to create value for customers, shareholders, and society while operating in competitive markets (Nag, Hambrick & Chen 2006). It helps in the external and internal analysis of the ESL classroom environments. It aims to maximize the use of resources for objectives (Bracker 1980). Bracker (1980) proposes a strategic management plan because it teaches mission, vision, and objective. Through strategic planning, teachers can implement their plans including policies.

Richard P. Rumelt (2011) described strategy as a type of problem-solving. He outlined a perspective on the components of strategy including Diagnosis, Guiding policies, and Action Plan. Teachers can use strategy as a plan to achieve their desired goals in remedial classrooms. Also, they can give a consistent pattern to their teaching to enhance teaching quality.

Research Method

The study follows a qualitative action research approach. The study involved the observation of remedial classes in the IT department of Sindh University. The classroom and lecture delivery were observed. Researchers took feedback from 40 students individually. The feedback was based on questions including the challenges they are facing. After that, the teachers' reflection was analyzed. Data was analyzed through structured classroom observation and reflective notes were prepared. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in teaching strategies, student responses, and classroom dynamics.

Observation of Remedial Classroom

The following are the parts observed.

1. Class conduction (Procedure)

On Monday Teacher came 10 minutes before the due time i.e., class timing was 8.30 and the teacher came into class at 8.20. It was the first period, and students kept on coming till the end of class. Initially, there were 19 students in the class. Therefore, the class started with 14 boys and 5 girls present in class. The teacher started the day by discussing brainstorming. It was a recap of a previously conducted class. The teacher explained the lesson from the book. She asked students to read a passage from the given lesson in the book and find quotations. The teacher highlighted a quotation from the lesson for the convenience of class. After assigning tasks to the students, she left them for 10 minutes, she kept on going to every student and explaining the task whenever students were confused. It was observed that students were unable to understand the task because of the large classroom and late arrival. Many students were found without books. There were only 7 books available in the class. The teacher kept on emphasizing students to come with the books. The teacher did not have her book and borrowed it from the student. Students were found struggling with new words. Sometimes they used a mobile dictionary to

find the meaning. It was the first time in class, so the teacher kept on repeating tasks for latecomers. After 10 minutes she asked students to share the quotations. Few students participated; the rest of the class remained passive. The teacher changed the task and asked them to highlight important lines from the lesson. She gave them 5 minutes for the task. After 5 minutes she encouraged students to speak. Those who were active were appreciated. This appreciation encouraged other students to speak. The teacher's behavior was friendly with students. Though the teacher was frank enough to solve the problems of students, even then many students were not interested in learning. The teacher kept on roaming in the class. She was audible to the entire class. The teacher does not use a whiteboard at all though somewhere the usage of the board was needed. The lecture was in English but sometimes she used Urdu for the convenience of students. Students answered the question quite boldly. The teacher explains every single point in the literature. She could not build a bridge between the lesson and the learner's field. The teacher responded to participants with yes, ok, fine, good. The class was a learner-centered class to some extent. The class ended with the end of the activity. At the end of class, 15 girls and 33 boys were in the class.

2. Class setting

Almost all furniture was reckoned. It was a large classroom. The chairs for students were not comfortable. The class setting was a traditional one. The girls were on one side and the boys on the other side. The dice were broken, and the entrance gate was on the front side so people who were passing outside disturbed the class.

3. Learner's Response

Girls were more active than the boys. The boys seemed uninterested in the class. A few boys in the front row were responding. Though the teacher asked questions one by one, even then the boys on the back benches remained passive in the class. Students' lack of motivation was observed.

Reflection

- The teacher belongs to the literature field therefore she connected literature with every example. Teachers must build a bridge between the lessons and the related field of learning to arouse the interest of students.
- It was a large classroom, there was no use, Mike. The teacher was unable to explain the task to students. Though she explained the lesson in clear words. The task should be explained in clear words to avoid interruption in the activity. There must be use of a mike in large classrooms.
- The topic was a continuation of the previous class, so the students were clear about the lesson.
- The class started without a warm-up activity though it was first class. There must be a warm-up activity to warm up the students.
- The teacher was friendly and approachable. She acted as a mentor.
- Students were consistently encouraged and motivated by the teacher. Students should be encouraged for active engagement.
- The strategic plane was overall organized in steps, there was a follow-up of the lesson plane. However, the lack of resources, including books may be the reason for the passive participation of students.

Students' feedback

Following were the random questions asked from Students and their feedback is drawn in graphic organization.

1. How frequently are you encouraged to participate actively and to engage in English language conversations with your peers?

Analysis

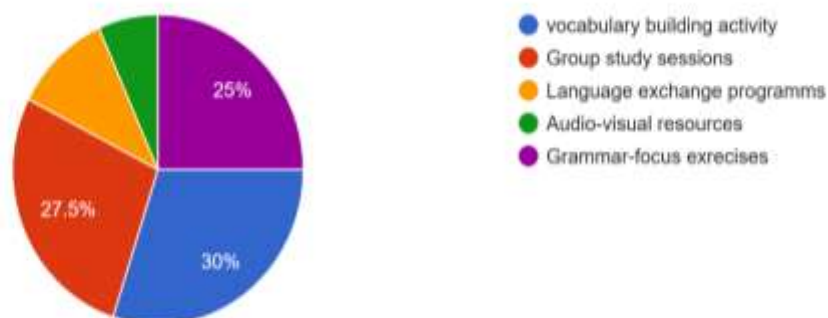
31% of the students agree about always being encouraged. 21% agree most of the time. 15% of the students agree on it sometimes. And only 8.3% of the students agree that they are not encouraged. And ignored in the class.

2. Which approaches do you understand can boost students' interest in Remedial classes?

Analysis

27.5% of the students proposed group study sessions. It is because many of the students said that group study sessions cannot cover the overall learning outcomes. It can only be a strategy for fostering students' active engagement. 30% of the students suggested vocabulary-building activities. Many of the students were struggling with the meanings of the new words during the class. 25% of students suggested grammar focus exercises in the remedial classes.

Figure: 3.1 Students' Feedback Analysis



Findings And Discussions

The following are the themes based on the data analysis.

1. Creativity

Creativity in any teaching method is the cause that can develop learners' interest and knowledge among the students. Creativity is the last step of cognition. This step develops not the interest but also enhances the level and improves their behaviors. However, linguists above warn that the expectations of major changes in pedagogy do require extended time. Similarly, Borko (2004) claims that "meaningful learning" can be slow and uncertain and that the level of change experienced by teachers will vary in its degrees. Thus, professional development should focus first and foremost on the teachers' creativity and be extended over time. Teachers' creativity should be implemented in the lesson plan.

Grammar teaching is the common method adopted by teachers in ESL classrooms. This creates traditionality and develops boresome among students. Teachers can bring creativity in teaching grammar rules for active engagement. It can be possible with the use of resources and

task-based approaches such as presentations. Graduate students can reflect on rules by themselves if they are given tasks to search for.

2. Student Engagement and Classroom Setting

The observation of the class uncovers that girls were more active than boys participants in the remedial Class. Boys' ratios remain passive even in the feedback. Out of 48 students, 40 students gave feedback. It is observed that the remedial class was more formal for boys in the IT department. They kept coming late to class. Classroom conditions also play an important role in students' active involvement. It creates positivity among learners. However, the classes and conditions remained suboptimal there in the IT department. The inadequate lighting reckoned furniture and noise disruption can be one of the challenges for students and teachers to bring their focus back on the task given in the classes.

3. Challenges in Remedial English Teaching

Students face many issues in Remedial English classrooms including learning new words and their meanings. They cannot express their ideas and opinions because of large classrooms. The classroom environment distracts/ hinders their motivation in active engagement. The teacher also struggles to bridge the gaps between students and their active involvement in the lesson. They have inadequate resources for task-based activities in the classrooms. Therefore, they cannot relate their learning to real-life situations. Additionally, the absence of warm-up activities reduced classroom engagement. Piaget's theory supports the study and findings. Accordingly, students learn best when they actively engage with material in a structured and meaningful way (Duffy & Cunningham, 2011). Applying this theory in remedial English teaching suggests that lessons should be designed to encourage students' active participation and problem-solving skills.

4. Teacher's responsibility

A teacher that already has experience in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), can maintain his/ her background in language teaching. She should recognize how her teaching skills can be adapted for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. Moreover, she will need to look for content specialists for help in designing appropriate lessons in the subject matter field she is teaching. As ESP teachers, they must play many roles. They may be asked to organize courses, set learning objectives, to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom, and to evaluate students' progress.

5. Structuring the Course

ESP students are usually adults who already have some familiarity with English and are learning the language to communicate a set of professional skills and perform job-related functions. Therefore, she/ he comes up with such text material or courses that fulfill the learner's needs.

6. Creating the Learning Environment

Teacher's skills for communication create the classroom atmosphere. Students acquire language when they have opportunities to use the language in interaction with other speakers. Being their teacher, the teacher may be the only English-speaking person available to students. And teacher's time with any of them is limited, the teacher can structure effective communication skills in the classroom. To do so, teachers must create lively interaction with students.

7. Evaluating the students

Teacher is a resource that helps students identify their language learning problems and find solutions to them. The teacher being the mentor personality of the class, /his responsivity is to observe every student that either they are getting the points or not. Teachers can check the student's improvement while conducting different kinds of tests. Or she/he can give those tasks or activities in the class which help the teacher to evaluate the students. Evaluations also help in active engagement.

In speaking class, the teacher can take presentations, or she can assign them any other activity like "telling stories". Then the teacher would come to know how much a student has improved. Teachers can find out the skills they need to focus on and take responsibility for making choices that determine what and how to learn. You will serve as a source of information for the students about how they are progressing in their language learning.

Conclusion

Part of ESP lessons is where students study English through a field that is already known and relevant to them to a certain degree depending on their educational level. Thus, students at a university level will, in an ideal situation, build on their General English knowledge and acquire specialized English terminology. This entirely depends on the teacher's skill to motivate the students to acquire the specific knowledge of the English language for their fields and profession therefore teachers must be active and multidirectional for specific direction.

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