

EXPANDING LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH COMICS

¹Dr. S. Rajeswari

Abstract--Various methods help language learners develop critical thinking, independence and problem-solving abilities. The present study examines how Comic strips provide a unique and exciting way to engage language learners in the world of English. The findings are significant that unplanned interactions create gap between theory and practice. Using comics in English classroom is about harnessing students' natural interests. Comic strips can be used from beginner level to advanced level for a variety of language activities and discussion activities as an expanding language learning opportunity. In the development of innovation comics enhance competency in expanding language learning by reducing the gap between theory and practice. Comics can be displayed digitally like animation. They can also be delivered in the form of overhead projector or in print form. This allows comics to be functional even in an English classroom that is not set up for the use of modern technology. The results suggest that Comics' content is easier to manage. They assist in decision-making and allow students to represent a professional situation based on theoretical precepts. Comics demand understanding the nature of the student-teacher relationship and the relationships among the students.

Key words--language learning, comics, learning opportunities, natural interests

I. INTRODUCTION

Adopting new technologies promote learning. Innovative teaching methods make students' learning process more integrated with meaningful experiences. Active teaching strategies integrate the action learning system for education. Language teaching strategies enhance learning as they are coherent in theory and practice. The reflection and action from the present experiences in the context of education aims to prepare the student to enter the workplace. The presence of traditional method is predominant and is marked by a notion of professors as unquestionable imparters of knowledge. Such method should be expanded to students through an extremely expository approach by the teacher. The learners are expected to memorise the text and the classroom atmosphere is competitive and individualistic. "There is a lack of interaction between professors and students, as well as among students" (Pimenta & Anastasiou, 2010).

Expanding language learning through comics make the "pedagogical practice" (Souza, Iglesias, & Pazin-Filho, 2014, p. 285) more transformative, reflective, critical and ethical. This leads to effective achievement of the education going beyond the limits of technical training. Few languages use phonemic symbols and ideograms. In the

¹M.A., M.phil, PGCTE, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Gokaraju Rangaraju Institute of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad, Telangana.
rajishankar96@gmail.com

early days, comics are used as an art of communication to encode meaning which is cradle of written language. Written language diverged from visually referential images are first seen in proto-comics and picture writing. As human writing began to serve broader purposes, ideograms proved insufficient and unable to capture abstract semantic meaning or encode phonetic sounds with ease. In response to the present needs written language involves a non-pictorial character that presents abstract concepts.

Adapting learning styles became a necessity:

New means of adapting to students' learning styles became a necessity. Use of comic strips in English classroom is an effective, innovative way of rising to this challenge. Comics also have features similar to the universal characteristics of language identified by Chomskian linguists. While the imagery in comics is far more representative of real objects than language, comic imagery also contains the linguistic feature of semantics, the use of communicative elements that "stand for something other than themselves" (Schmidt). Comics are more conducive to language learning than clip art or stand-alone images. Comics play a vital role to integrate images with words to narrate a story. They are more engaging for English language learners than the isolated images that so many ESL/EFL textbooks are riddled with. Comics' material is widely accepted teaching aid in English classroom. The material may be in the form of strips, single panel cartoons and books are ubiquitous in classroom materials for teaching English. In the light of prior experience and knowledge the learner builds understanding by constructive perspectives. Comics help to reorganise and restructure the learners' experience transmitting and expanding their learning opportunity.

Absolute domain of teachers:

The classroom has been understood as an absolute domain of teachers. This has led many teachers to look only to presenting the course material, forgetting the learner, who still lives a drama between the "subjective and the objective, theory and practice, the concrete and the abstract, order and disorder" (Gil, 2005). Teachers need to choose the right comics for their students and use them in ways that promote language learning effectively. It is necessary to know the information pertinent to the course for the practice of teaching. There is a shift of focus from the instructor to the learner, who assumes responsibility for their own learning. This leads to valuing the learner's ability developing individual autonomy and communication skills.

These innovative teaching methods make students' learning process more integrated with meaningful experiences in their own lives. Comic strips can be used by teachers to "arrest the attention of students" at a time of fierce competition with other forms of interaction. "The diffusion of active teaching strategies demands the training of professor and the students" (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010). The learners must be engaged and in learning in a more interesting and meaningful way. The engagement of learners at various levels individually or in small groups implies productive learning.

II. METHODS

There are a number of methods that English language teachers can use their knowledge of comics' in connection to global popular culture, national interests, and religions. Comics and images featuring Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck with learners as young as two and as old as fifty eight, from regions as diverse as the Middle East, West Asia, East Asia, East Africa and Latin America. In most of the TESOL settings, one can find learners who will react to the classic Disney characters with recognition, understanding, and acceptance.

The use of comic genre in teaching was the development of autonomy, freedom, and creativity and still the fact of being a student-centered education strategy. Comics are used to extend basic reading skills facilitating more reading. Comics-based reading comprehension activities are used and mentioned frequently as authentic material by English language teachers in their classrooms. Prompting the learners to use both visual and written clues to place out-of-sequence comic panels in proper order seems to be a common activity. Separating a comics' text from its images and prompting English language learners to properly match the words and images correctly is also frequently suggested. Both of these activities, along with the other common language classroom activities that use comics to improve reading skill, encourage students to use comics' extra linguistic visual context to expand reading comprehension and make the task less intimidating.

Comic format can be applied to different subjects. It provides a method for conveying large amounts of information quickly. Comics can be used to illuminate the more long-winded or seemingly mundane portions of a lesson plan. The immediacy of comics can put the language learners in a receptive mood. Incorporating comics play a key role in a helpful way to provide levity to tackle a difficult subject. "Language learning and language use take place simultaneously" (Larsen-Freeman) the learners need to prepare themselves for international contexts of use of English language. This can be reached when "English is taught *as* communication" (Widdowson).

Comics are of a great starting point for discussion. A solid comic can provide unique visuals, ideas, points of view, and more for a language learner. Combining and processing the two key ingredients of a comic, text and image, helps develop a sharp memory for language learning in an effective way. The ability to produce and contribute a comic can fulfill the learners need.

Vocabulary is the important component of English language. Building up of useful vocabulary is central in learning a foreign language. A comic can offer basic familiarity with English words. The development process of comics in the groups was also marked by conflicts among those with different learning styles. The great diversity of ideas that emerged in individual reflection demanded the definition of the set and the characters during the stage of discussion in the group. "Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency" (Richard and Renandya). It provides strong base for language learners to improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Teachers use comics and cartoon characters as an accessible way to acclimate newly arrived ESL/EFL students to popular culture. As such so they can have a common frame of reference with their classmates and their instructors during class discussions. Creating book clubs and in-class group reading activities in English classrooms that use comics to prompt group discussions on cultural values that are related to the fictional tropes often found in comics. English teachers often find comicstrips especially useful for cultural discussions. The use of ethnic accent, regional dialects and colloquial language helps the learners develop their reading ability. The acquisition of vocabulary plays

a vital role for successful second language learning, because without an extensive vocabulary we will be unable to use the structure and function for comprehensive communication. The expansion of language learning develops a skill of “critical thinking, collaboration and motivation” (Lai and Viering 2012). It is necessary for English language teachers to identify what they want their students to learn and be able to do at the end of their course.

III. CONCLUSION

Undergraduate teaching requires mastery of pedagogical techniques that require. There is a need to modify teaching strategies to integrate theory and practice into the learning process in English classroom. Comics are more conducive to language learning. They are often connected to globally appealing stories and famous characters rooted in popular culture. Comics also integrate images with words more engaging learners to tell a story. Learners can exchange experiences through organised activities thus results to achieve educational goals. As a result students develop a critical thinking capability that establishes relationship between teacher and learner and relation among learners.

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