

# NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES AS LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES

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## Abstract

Language learning in classroom need not be confined to the 'prescribed texts'. Use of non-conventional materials is sometimes more engaging. Materials created not for the purpose of language learning but for real-life situations such as news items and magazine articles may very well be exploited for effective language learning. In addition, they may provide the learners with much required motivation. Newspapers and magazines particularly offer a variety of materials such as 'hard news' stories and in-depth 'human interest' feature stories that could be planned for a number of language learning activities. Authenticity, accessibility and flexibility are some of the factors for these materials to be considered as language learning resources. A wide range of LSRW skills, a cluster of soft skills and various components of communicative competence may be enhanced with the strategic use of these learning materials. Pedagogy involved is learning by doing. The desired learning outcomes would be activating learner interest and contextualizing the learning.

**Key Words:** Prescribed texts, Non-conventional learning materials, Authenticity, Pedagogy and Desired learning outcome.

## 1.0 Role of Non-Conventional Resources

Language learning in classroom need not be confined to the 'prescribed texts'. It may sometimes be more engaging and rewarding when non-conventional and 'authentic' materials are used. Materials both written and spoken, created not for language learning purpose but for real-life situations such as news items, magazine articles, movies, television shows, train schedule, etc. may very well be exploited for effective language learning. The range of materials including colourful pictures and crispy advertisements may serve as a platform for more meaningful communicative tasks and provide the learners with the necessary motivation. Newspapers and magazines particularly offer a variety of materials - 'hard news' stories linked to the news and politics, in-depth 'human interest' feature stories about places or personalities, photographs of recent events, diagrams, graphs, maps and tables of statistics, weather, financial and entertainment information, and political cartoons and editorials linked to the latest news, horoscopes and puzzles – that could be planned for a number of language learning activities.

The main factor for these materials to be considered as language learning resources is 'authenticity'. Secondly, such materials are available abundantly online that comes directly from target cultures of the language we teach. Further, these materials provide our students with 'real life' linguistic input, cultural information, General Knowledge, Value based education, etc. In addition, these current and life related issues are highly engaging, enjoyable and educative. Above all, they are flexible to be designed for language skills development at different levels – from the basic to the advanced. In fact, these materials are to be regarded as effective instructional materials as they offer great advantage over materials written for the purpose of language learning.

## 2.0 Skills Learnt

A wide range of language related skills may strategically be taught with these materials. Various components of communicative competence – grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence may be enhanced with the strategic use of these learning materials. Clearly language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing may be inculcated. Further, teaching of semantic items such as vocabulary, idiomatic Expressions and novel expressions is surely possible. In addition, important language learning items like grammar and pronunciation may be designed to achieve accuracy. Above all, a cluster of soft skills - thinking skill, critical analysis, creative writing, summarizing, elaborating, reporting, describing and narrating are effectively taught with the use of these learning materials.

## 3.0 Pedagogy Involved

Certain pedagogies - learner-centered approach, teacher being facilitator and outcome based learning are involved in the use of Newspapers and Magazines as language learning resources. Learner-centered teaching is increasingly being encouraged in higher education as it focuses on student learning. At the same time, teacher as a facilitator should assist the learners in acquiring those skills and grant the learners necessary space to participate, innovate and produce language. Finally, outcome-based learning that insists on goals/outcomes should also be encouraged. Therefore, classes, opportunities, and assessments should all help learners achieve the specified outcomes.

## 4.0 Desired Learning Outcomes

Outcome based learning is certainly desirable. Use of Non-Conventional Resources such as news items, articles, editorials of Newspapers and Magazines would enable to supplement teaching in different learning areas, activate learner interest in the topic we want to teach, contextualize the learning within their life experiences, make abstract ideas more concrete and update and above all supplement textbooks. Further, it paves way for developing basic reading skills of learners such as skimming, scanning and reading more quickly and with better comprehension. It helps learners develop the skills of summarizing, improving

vocabulary and fostering a reading culture in class. It also supports developing writing and speaking skills of learners. Improving basic writing and debating skills like presenting information in an organized and logical way as well as more advanced skills such as writing persuasively and imaginatively is surely possible.

### 5.0 Certain things to be kept in mind

While desired learning outcomes are expected, naturally teachers and learners follow certain specific guidelines. It should be ensured that the article is not lengthy. A detailed article may take more time through which learners may lose interest. Instead, article or news item chosen for language learning should be brief and engaging the attention of the learners so that they get motivated and further it would be viable for effective and rewarding discussion. Hence, the task should be devised in a systematic way to make it even more interesting. Weather forecast, advertisements, headlines may, for instance, be glanced quickly and learners will pick up learning items fast. Sometimes photographs and illustrations published in newspapers may also be useful to conduct language learning activities such as group discussion, describing object and situations.

### 6.0 Types of Language Learning Activities

Based on the rationale behind the use of non-conventional resources for language learning, innumerable activities of varied interest may be designed and engineered for language learning. Preparation is the key. Perhaps a teaching procedure of 5 stages – identifying the appropriate learning materials, planning the type of activity, actually designing the tasks, administering the tasks systematically and evaluating the feasibility – is to be followed for ensuring learning outcome. The following are some suggestions to plan for language learning activities.

#### 6.1 News Item

The following language learning activities on the news item “Non-inclusive govt schools hindering growth of students with disabilities” (Appendix A), that appeared in *The New Indian Express* on September 23, 2018 may successfully be devised in three stages of *Pre Activities*, *While Activities* and *Post Activities* and administered in language classroom.

##### 6.1.1 Pre Activities

Pre activities include learning vocabulary. Meaning, synonym and antonyms of ‘escort’, ‘census’, ‘integration’, ‘survive’, ‘accessible’, ‘survey’, ‘braille’, ‘federation’, ‘cite’, ‘bullying’, ‘concert’, ‘ramps’, ‘steep’, etc. may be discussed. Secondly, idiomatic expressions such as ‘let down’, ‘broken down’ are to be learnt. Next, various forms of a word such as ‘select’ (v), ‘selection’ (n), ‘selective’ (adj), and ‘selectively’ (adv) could be a meaningful discussion. Then, prior knowledge of the subject matter in the news item may also be harnessed for language learning: ‘what infrastructure facilities are available for children in government schools?’, ‘what are the other purposes for which government schools are used?’, ‘why children drop-out from schools?’ etc. Above all, the habit of silent reading may be cultivated.

##### 6.1.2 While Activities

First of all, the skill of loud reading that is forgotten nowadays is encouraged and skillfully used for learning enunciation, pronunciation and stress. Another important learning item is grammar. Teaching of ‘if clause, cause and effect’ (condition and result) using ‘*if the child is from an economically backward family, this is (will be) a problem*’ is certainly possible. Even reported speech with the use of ‘Rajiv Rajan, the executive director, Extha foundation ... *said that the ramps built in schools were too steep to access independently*’ could be cited for analysis. In addition, passive voice could be illustrated well with sentences such as ‘a total of 75 schools *were surveyed*’. Further, use of relative pronoun is shown clearly in ‘Dev is a student with learning disability *who* pursued his schooling in a government school in the city.’ Some of these grammar items are better learnt in context. Situational learning is, thus, more effective.

Vocabulary development could be another activity. From ‘school education’, other related expressions such as ‘adult education’, ‘non-formal education’ and from ‘learning disability’ to ‘intellectual disability’, ‘physical disability’ are to be generated.

Understanding the content is also crucial. Some of the comprehension questions such as ‘why are the children with learning disabilities not encouraged in government schools?’, ‘who, according to the passage, can complete their in government schools?’, and ‘is Dev a successful student?’ would be useful for extracting the meaning.

Even a debate may be conducted. Volunteers to argue for and against the education and facilities provided by government schools may be invited. It would be an interesting learning experience.

##### 6.1.3 Post Activities

As follow up activities, creative writing task on ‘if I were Education Minister, I would set up model schools in every district...’ would encourage learners to ventilate their feelings and thoughts. In addition, survey and report writing on ‘what are the infrastructural facilities required for all types of students at school level?’ may be thought of.

#### 6.2 Property Pages

Here is another example of the way in which a local newspaper will be used to make a conventional part of a Human and Social Studies lesson more relevant for learners. The teacher uses the property section of a weekend newspaper and a worksheet to introduce concepts in urban settlement geography. A sample worksheet based on these questions: ‘In what parts of the town can you buy factory space?’, ‘where would you look for shops to let?’, ‘name the suburbs where you can rent flats’, ‘list the suburbs where house prices are over Rs.10,00,000’, ‘where are house prices the lowest?’, ‘in which areas are there gated community/town houses for sale?’, etc.

#### 6.3 Photography

For the activity on photography, the class may be divided into pairs and two different images are distributed. Each pair would write down a few questions that each one would like to ask the other about the picture. The picture and the list of questions may be swapped with the partner. Each one should try to answer the partner's questions based on what is seen in his or her picture.

They may discuss the kind of things they learn from doing this activity. It will be a 'stimulating' way to introduce a new topic. Good photographs evoke deep emotions and offer a number of possible interpretations. This is especially so when contrasting photographs are chosen for the activity.

#### 6.4 Cartoon Analysis

Cartoon could also be skillfully used for language learning. Following are the steps to be followed for cartoon analysis: identifying the event or issue that cartoon refers to, relating it to various other issues/events that could be relevant, recognizing the characters and noting down their significance, making a list of symbols and their connotations, explaining the words/slogans used in the cartoons, deriving the opinion of the cartoonist on the issue, expressing learners' opinion on the same whether they agree or disagree, and figuring out the technical aspects of the cartoon that play a role in understanding the meaning.

#### 6.5 Snippet

Snippets are usually news items in a digest form. The terms 'snippet', 'news digest', 'tidbits' are synonymous. They mean a small but interesting piece of news. They are provided to grab attention of the reader instantaneously. Only the bare essentials of an event are provided. By attempting to convert a snippet into full blown news story, learners are required to use their imagination and their linguistic resources. A detailed news story may similarly be converted into a snippet.

#### 6.5 Cover Story in Supplementary Page / Magazine

Sometimes articles or write up found in supplementary column or magazine is quite interesting and engaging to young learners. Appropriate tasks on Profiles and Pictures, Personalities are possible for language learning. Education Plus, Metro Plus, Sunday Magazine, Business Line, Empower, Entertainment are supplementary pages of some well-known dailies in India. Replicating, for instance, a profile or cover story of a personality with any other professionals like musician, singer, doctor, driver and engineer could be an interesting writing activity.

#### 6.6 Headlines

The primary purpose of the headline is to grab the attention of readers and get first sentence read. Here are four rules of thumb to be kept in mind to achieve this purpose. They're known as the "four 'u's" of headline writing by a number of copywriters. The four u's are that headline should be unique, ultra-specific, useful and convey a sense of urgency. Based on these understanding, learners are to be trained to guess the details of the news from the headlines and condense the news into a meaningful headline.

#### 7.0 Food for Thought

News items in Newspapers & Magazine do not constitute a rigid textbook that follows a formulaic pattern but a catalyst for varying the learning activities in language classroom. The in-built flexibility offers instructors a lot freedom to generate their own language learning tasks so that learners' interests are sustained by providing variety and novelty. For learners, the constant exposure to new materials in the form of fresh news stories and analysis is not only stimulating but expand their knowledge of current affairs as well.

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## Appendix A:

MANY BARRIERS

### Non-inclusive govt schools hindering growth of students with disabilities

SUSHMITHA RAMAKRISHNAN  
@Cheral

Two years after being forced by his teachers to drop out of school as "he was not smart enough", Dev Nath passed class 10 state board exams, and even scored 84 marks in Science. "They told me that I couldn't pass... that I was bad at studies," he said.

Dev is a student with a learning disability who pursued his schooling in a government school in the city. His teachers and principal convinced him that he cannot clear public exams like other students. After clearing class 10 exams, he now pursues higher secondary schooling at Vidya Sagar, a centre for special education, and wants to work in the IT sector.

He is one among scores of students with disabilities, who have been let down by the State's school education system. Although 1.36 lakh students with disabilities were enrolled in government and aided schools in 2016-17, only around a tenth of them received either a kit box, escort, or transport or more than of them, according to the policy note of School Education Department 2017-18. Only 283 students were given Braille study material although 18 per cent of all persons with disabilities are identified to have visual impairment according to 2011 census.

The census also reveals that literacy rate among persons with disabilities is about 60 per cent, when the State has a rate of 80 per cent. However, literacy rate may not reflect reality in schools, as students with disabilities are forced to drop out, mostly around class 8, as they are promoted through classes without actual integration into main-stream education until then, pointed Sujatha Sriram, a special educator.

"Children, with only mild disabilities survive education in main-stream government schools after that. Other students are asked to either drop-out, change discipline of study or learn from home," she said, adding that some times, parents are even made to wait the whole day to assist their wards. This is a problem, if the child is from an economically backward family, as an earning member of the family is forced to stay back to assist the child.

When Express visited government and government-aided schools in the city, only select blocks in many schools, even had basic inclusive infrastructure like ramps. Staff from these schools confirmed that most of these ramps were laid, when their schools were polling booths. Such

**Q** I've had to hold my bladder till the end of the day until my mother came. Even though the toilet was in the ground floor, it was too small and difficult to access by myself on my wheelchair  
Government school student

schools were accessible, only from the gate to the rooms that were used as polling booths. This left toilets in many schools inaccessible. "I've had to hold my bladder till the end of the day until my mother came. Even though the toilet was in the ground floor, it was difficult to access by myself on my wheelchair," said Ram Kumar\*, another government school student with physical disability.

Rajiv Rajan, the executive director Ektha foundation, who did a study of polling stations during 2016 elections, said that the ramps built in schools were too steep to access independently. "Narrow corridors, and sandy approach to the ramps create major barriers for access," he said, emphasising that very few schools had proper access to toilets.

Yasantham Federation, an NGO, found through a sampled survey in Thiruvallur district, that only 25 per cent of government schools at least had ramps. A total of 75 sample schools were surveyed. "Ramps and building western toilets were the only infrastructural change made even in the 25 per cent of schools. Children with intellectual disabilities were being persuaded to discontinue after class 5.

Barely any teacher knew sign language or braille," said A Lingston, from the federation.

With very little inclusive measures in place, only students who can verbally communicate well and have average cognitive development can complete their education in mainstream government schools, said Kalpana Rao, the principal of Vidya Sagar. When students can't express themselves properly, or need extra attention, or have multiple disabilities, schools even cite bullying as an excuse to wash their hands off the responsibility, she claimed.

"When Dev joined us, he was psychologically broken down and his self esteem was really poor. It took us three months to make him feel normal again," said Kalpana adding that teachers from the school, took Dev to every play talk show, concert and performance in the city in those three months, in order to expose him to the various career options he had. "We didn't need grand investments to re-integrate him into education. We just had to believe in him and had to invest a little extra time in him than usual," she said.

Every school should be accessible to students with disabilities by 2019, according to the orders of the Supreme Court, said Pradeep Yadav, the principal secretary to the School Education Department. However, he did not specify the steps the state would take to implement this.

#### Needed: Supportive campuses

The Rights of People with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, which came into effect in 2016, stresses on inclusive education. It calls for accessible classrooms and teachers trained to communicate effectively with PwDs



Inaccessible toilets and poorly-constructed ramps in some government schools | COURTESY: RAJIV RAJAN

#### Measures needed

- To establish adequate number of teacher training institutions
- To train and employ teachers, including teachers with disability who are qualified in sign language and Braille
- To train professionals and staff
- To establish adequate number of resource centres to support educational institutions at all levels
- To promote the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes including means and formats of communication, Braille and sign language to supplement the use of one's own speech to fulfill the daily communication needs

#### What the law says

- Educational institutions funded or recognised by govt shall admit them without discrimination
- make building, campus and various facilities accessible
- provide reasonable accommodation according to individual's requirements
- provide necessary support individualised or otherwise in environments that maximise academic and social development
- ensure that the education to persons who are blind or deaf or both is imparted in the most appropriate languages and modes
- detect specific learning disabilities at the earliest and take suitable pedagogical and other measures to overcome them
- transportation facilities to children with disabilities and also the attendant of the children having high support needs

