

Original Paper

The Role of English Language Newspapers in Language Improvement

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Abstract

This article explores the role that English language newspapers play in the improvement of English language. Even though English language newspapers are or may not be primarily designed to improve linguistic skills of learners, there are many ways by which a second-language learner can benefit from them. The newspapers have a variety of columns, ranging from news, views, articles, games, and so on, that are very interesting to the daily lives of readers. At the same time, the newspapers are prepared in such a way that they pass through a rigorous process of editing in terms of the verifiability of their stories and the linguistic formality of their sentences and paragraphs. The newspapers use a wide variety of word class vocabularies, phrases, idioms, and expressions to give metaphorical meanings to their stories. To the English language learner who reads those newspapers on a continuous basis and is given assignments by teachers to discuss, debate, have conversation, and answer comprehension questions from them, the linguistic benefits are enormous. This article explains how learners would be able to boost their vocabulary, reading skills, listening skills, as well as speaking abilities by using English language newspapers.

Keywords

EFL, ESL, word class, linguistic acquisition, language skills, idiomatic expressions, comprehension

Language improvement involves the enhancement of the four linguistic skills—Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, in an individual. For a non-native speaker who wants to improve his or her second language, many factors may come handy in aiding and speeding the process. When speaking about the improvement of English language as a secondary language, these skills need to be acquired and developed through a variety of mechanisms, of which one is the use of English language newspapers. Although English language newspapers are not primarily created for the improvement of one's English, they have a huge contribution to make in the process. Newspapers are able to enhance language

improvement of an individual through the development of vocabulary as well as their grammatical usage of word class, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. They also enhance the learner's knowledge of idiomatic expressions, their debating skills, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and discussion capabilities. An example of how English newspapers can enhance a learner's idiomatic expressions is provided by Jose, Preethi, Vijaya, 2022:

It is evident that the pupils can enlarge their usage of idiomatic expressions by reading the content after getting a proper training for a week in Headlines Comprehension. Some of the idioms used as the headlines of *THE HINDU* newspaper in India dated 30 January 2018 are given below. a) Spill the beans—When the police enquired him, he spilled the beans, which means he uttered the truth when the police enquired. b) Make a beeline—As the rural and urban local bodies in the two districts started receiving applications since last week, women in large numbers made a beeline to the RTOs and their unit offices, which means there is a long queue. c) To and fro—Last fortnight, I travelled by *Pearl City Express* to and fro from *Thoothukudi*. d) Bring to book—A 48—year-old widow doused herself with kerosene and “attempted” self-immolation at the main entrance - on Monday accusing the police of failing to bring to book those responsible for her daughter's death two years ago. Jose, Preethi, Vijaya, 2022 (p. 5383)

English language newspapers are able to accomplish the development of the four key linguistic skills in learners due to their interesting contents and presentation. The contents of the newspapers can be taken by teachers to the classroom to provide activities to their students who could be assigned to read a newspaper and come to the classroom and conduct a variety of class activities such as discussion and debating for the enhancement of their language. The contents of English newspapers vary from news to entertainment, to education, games and sports, and so on. All these relevant contents sharpen the learners' minds as well as improve their linguistic abilities. Learners may find so many important and interesting materials in the English newspapers such as ads and other relevant information about their immediate surrounding and the world in general. Therefore when teachers of ESL/ESL make use of materials and contents from English newspapers, they are aware that they are not only helping their learners improve linguistically but also broadening their general knowledge of the world in the process. As Srinavas Rao notes:

Since print and electronic media attracts the learners in learning the language well, the teachers should try to adopt such variety of materials to keep the learners active in their ESL/EFL classrooms. The teachers can try out a wide range of activities using print media such as newspapers and magazines so that the learners participate in the activities very actively with utmost interest. Newspapers play an important role in teaching English as they publish the columns about news, reviews, editorials, historical

events, games and sports, movies, entertainment, education, literature and poetry, science and technology, politics, business, weather, Ads, comics and so on. Newspapers publish regional, national and international news and they are fresh every day. Therefore, the language used in the newspapers entirely different from the language used in the textbooks. Rao, 2019 (p. 68)

An important aspect of newspapers is that they have sections that are interesting to all sectors of the society, from young to old. That makes English language newspapers very feasible tools of language improvement as they contain materials designed for all levels of reading ability. The real life and current interesting issues that are present in the newspapers also put into consideration these population diversity interests. The learning from English newspapers therefore becomes not a task but something of a pleasant experience for the learners. Newspapers tend to be very structured and well prepared in an ethical manner that it makes them a safe choice for different educational and curriculum levels by school teachers for their students. While providing experience of the real world to the students, English language newspapers therefore instill educational value in the learners. With constant reading of English language newspapers the reading habit of the learners grows and becomes fun and an easy part of their lives, further speeding up the process of linguistic acquisition. One of the main advantages that newspapers have for the teacher and the learner is that they can be preserved for a long time that they can be read at the leisure of the learner as they can be copied or cut and saved for future reading. The relative affordability and availability and their wide variety of contents makes newspapers effective in the process of language improvement. According to Wijewardene Lishanthi, 2021:

Education World (2011) has enunciated ten broad reasons as to why newspapers are effective classroom teaching tools. 1). They are a medium that students of all ability levels can be read. 2). They deal with what's happening here and now, providing motivation for reading and discussion. 3). They make learning fun 4). They are extremely flexible and adaptable to all curriculum areas and grade levels. 5). They bridge the gap between the classroom and the 'real' world. 6). They build good reading habits that will last a lifetime. 7). They can be cut, marked, clipped, pasted, filed and recycled. 8). They give everyone something to read - news, sports, weather, etc. 9). They are a cost-effective way to educate. 10. They contain practical vocabulary and the best models for clear and concise writing. Wijewardene, 2021 (p. 2)

English language newspapers contribute in the improvement of spoken English as they can be used as a tool for conversation, discussion, and debating among learners in classrooms and outside of the classroom. In this connection, the role of teachers is very important in selecting the content for conversation from an English newspaper and bringing it to the classroom for the learners to first study and discuss among them using the English language. Further this activity would arouse their interest and motivate them to practice their communication skills in English. The role of the teacher is therefore to monitor the discussion protocols and guide the learners with some linguistic errors that would arise out of the

conversation as a lesson for all to learn from and not as a mistake to avoid at all costs because it is from these mistakes that the teacher identifies the students' areas for improvement and works on to make them better. Their listening skills also develop as they listen to each other as well as the teacher during the discussions and learn in the process. By selecting good information materials from English newspapers, the teacher helps the learners engage in an interesting discussion both in terms of knowledge and language. Akhter Shamin writes:

They explore the several innovative ways of conversation in classrooms and widen the understanding of the learners. Daily, teachers should use the newspapers in class and select specific topic for discussion. The instructor should ask the students to express their opinion about the assigned topic in written form. Learners can be allowed to express their views loudly in class and they can start discussion in class with other fellows under supervision of teachers. So, in this way, discussion on the different topics regarding newspapers, provides a great deal of knowledge and broadens the understanding of the learners. Their listening, writing, and speaking skills can be improved. 'Treasure Hint' is a game from Newspaper which may prove effective in providing information in groups and it will also create a sense of co-operation among learners. Akhter, 2020 (pp. 965-966)

Reading English newspapers helps the learner in various areas of life while at the same time helping boost their vocabulary. The increase of the wealth of vocabulary for a language learner is vital as it is the building block of languages and without the knowledge of vocabulary no learner would be successful in linguistic improvement. Therefore reading newspapers is the easiest way to acquire new vocabulary. As the learner continues to read newspapers from time to time their reading habit grows and their reading ability and speed also improves incrementally, making it easy for language improvement. When the speed and reading ability improves the learner becomes fond of reading more and more that their interest increases significantly. When there is interest then many things are simplified as the learner takes it as a pleasant endeavor and not as a task. One of the main ways that newspapers increase the interest of the learner is by making available new information and useful stories for day-to-day life of the learner and the society. At this level the learner does not even think he or she is learning language, as it is equally relevant for their life that the information they are getting from newspapers ends up helping improve their language without a deliberate effort at doing so. That way the learner kills two birds with one stone. There is a sense of pride and satisfaction that comes with the realization that reading newspapers is an esteemed activity as newspapers are prepared in such a way that they are designed to be of the highest fitness to society. This is important for parents that the high level of ethical and editorial responsibility gives them a sense of comfort that their children are reading cultured and ethical texts in contrast to what they may get from other less controlled social media outlets. With the steady development of vocabulary then learners are able to improve their ability in writing as they learn from best prepared grammatical structures provided by the newspapers. When they venture writing in English then what they have learned

from newspapers comes handy in shaping their composition writing. By reading newspapers out loud, learners may develop speaking skills as it improves their pronunciation. Pairing with a partner or partners also, learners may listen to each other reading the newspapers aloud and thereby develop their listening skills.

English language learners learn from the newspapers different ways of writing by studying the various ways of grammatical structures that English newspapers use in their texts. With this knowledge of different ways of grammatical structures, they may be able to be flexible in their writing in expressing complex issues in their composition and in speaking. Newspapers prepare stories with different sorts of metaphorical images and attractiveness. The learners are not bored but are continually fascinated and entertained while reading the various imaginative ways of presentation that their reading time becomes pleasant as opposed to tense and hard. That is why learners may easily learn and improve their English language with reading English newspapers which they find very friendly and appealing. Apart from learning different grammatical structures from English newspapers, learners acquire a great deal of knowledge about new ways of using idiomatic expressions and phrases as writers of newspapers use a wide varieties of idioms, phrases and expressions in their stories. Learners develop their awareness of how to use them in writing or speaking in English and their ability to understand various idiomatic expressions grows significantly in the process. Naresh Pawar, 2023 outlines the advantages of English newspapers as such:

English newspapers are a primary source of news and information for millions of people around the world. They provide up-to-date information on local, national, and international news, politics, sports, entertainment, and more. English newspapers are an excellent resource for language learners. They offer a wealth of authentic reading material, including articles, editorials, and opinion pieces, which can help learners, develop their vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Many English newspapers also provide opinion and analysis on current events, offering different perspectives on important issues. This can be useful for those looking to broaden their understanding of the world and develop their critical thinking skills. English newspapers are a valuable platform for advertisers, providing them with access to a wide audience. They offer a range of advertising options, from classified ads to full page spreads, making them an effective marketing tool for businesses. English newspapers also provide entertainment in the form of comics, puzzles, horoscopes, and other features. These can be a fun and engaging way to relax and pass the time. Pawar, 2023 (p. 155)

One of the main problems faced by learners of English as a second language is that students have to study other subjects for their academic purposes as well in order to pass their exams. Therefore the amount of time allocated to study English language is therefore shared with the other tasks. The learners have to make effort outside of their study time for specific purpose of improving their language. The teachers

can also help them in classrooms to achieve that aim. One of the ways to do it is by engaging students in activities using English newspapers, such as debating news articles, discussing current issues, making simple conversations about news items, reading newspaper stories and answering some follow-up questions prepared by the teacher, etc. The teacher may either give an assignment to students to read newspapers during the weekend and come and discuss in class or he or she may simply bring the English newspaper to the class and allow students to participate in those activities. In so doing their reading comprehension, writing skills, listening and speaking skills will improve. The continuous feeding of new and interesting information to students makes it appealing for them to want to read and engage more in the future as the task becomes attractive and easy with time. The teacher may guide the students develop their communication skills among each other by controlling the time and monitoring the learners' language, content and organization as they engage in those activities. He or she can help by making sure that every learner has an equal opportunity for participation in the discussions by introducing a friendly atmosphere whereby the learners would find the activities fun and entertaining as well as educational. With the variety of new contents they dig out from English newspapers and discuss in their classroom, learners will develop ideas about many important life style issues and sharpen their minds. They will find it easy to communicate in English and express themselves on any ideas and events using the English language. They may also learn the style of writing in the English newspapers, which are prepared well by experienced columnists and editors and develop their own skills of creative and non-creative writing and become writers themselves in the future. Learners using English language newspapers for language improvement will always be aware of the news and events of the times and that will help them be updated on current issues. Therefore, when the time comes that they may have to explain and discuss those current issues in real-life, learners who use English language newspapers will find it easy to be able to communicate not only with knowledge of the situation but also with clarity of grammar, confidence about their source material and develop a sense of pride in knowing that discussing aspects from newspapers is chiefly an esteemed activity in the society. As noted by Shivender Rahul, 2016:

Role of Newspapers in Students Life: Teaching English to a non-native English speakers is somewhat challenging as it take a lot of time in understanding students learn or cram their syllabus and pass their examination but they fail in speaking, reading and writing and we think Newspapers can be vital in enhancing all their talents as they play an important role in this regard. • Opens many new ways of discussion and conversation in classroom. • Can discuss innumerable aspects of newspapers daily and can do a creative writing section on the spot every day. • Working of a newspaper can give many new ideas and openings • A lot of job opportunities can be found through 'Classified' section. • Daily discussion of 'Headlines' give a lot of knowledge and exposure. • Games as 'Treasure Hint' from Newspaper can give vital information in pairs and increase feeling of sharing and team work. • Can learn Photography and

interest in the use of Camera. • Writing of Articles will increase their knowledge of Grammar and creativity. Rahul, 2016 (p. 483)

The role of English language newspapers for the improvement of English language could be summed up in terms of their contribution in the development learners' vocabulary, phrases and idiomatic expressions, sentences and paragraphs, debates, group discussions, translation, comprehension, listening and pronunciation, chiefly. The development of vocabulary constitutes the main building blocks of one's language as it is with words that one can function in linguistic endeavors. With continuous exposure to English newspapers a learner is able to increase his or her vocabulary with new words added to their existing knowledge of vocabulary from time to time. The increased level of vocabulary will then help the learner to speak or express ideas in English with confidence and conveniently. The increase in the knowledge of phrases, idioms, and expressions also follows a similar route to that of building their vocabulary. When learners are exposed to English newspapers for a continued period of time the use of phrases, idioms, and expressions by the English newspapers becomes familiar to them and adds to their further understanding of complex meanings and they become conversant with using them in their written or spoken language. Before English language newspapers are distributed out to readers, great care is done in using formalized and refined sentences and they are edited carefully. This allows learners to access very reliable sources of well written sentences and hence well-constructed paragraphs. As a result of continuous exposure to such highly refined sentence patterns and paragraph writings, learners are able to emulate and use them when they explain or express anything in the language of English.

The continuous exposure to activities by teachers to learners with English language newspapers allows students to learn from different types of debates, discussions, points of views, that they use them in their classroom discussions and sharpen their minds with them, at the same time improving their language. Their ability to translate to-and-from English and their language as well as their ability to answer reading comprehension questions extracted from English language newspapers means that the learners have improved in grasping meanings and ideas even when they find them in other sources such as books and electronic media. With a continued activities of debating and discussions also students develop their ability in listening skills as well as spoken English. The role of English language newspapers is involved in developing the four skills of language: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Therefore it is advisable for teachers to encourage learners to use English language newspapers to improve their language and parents as well as students themselves should take the initiative to develop the habit of reading English language newspapers to be successful in English language.

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