

4

Language Across Curriculum — Why Every Teacher should be a Language Teacher

Sandhya Sangai*

Abstract

Use of language is essential in the teaching–learning process. Learners assimilate new concepts through language. Ideas and content get conveyed and understood through language. Therefore, competent language skills facilitate learning in all subject areas. The Language Across Curriculum (LAC) approach emphasises how using Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) available in different languages enhance the learners’ learning pace and quality of learning. So, all subject teachers must encourage correct use of language by the learners while reading, writing or discussing concepts, and in classroom processes related to their respective subjects. Input rich classroom and activity based teaching–learning process induce student–student and student–teacher interactions. Such an environment facilitates the use of different words by students. Also, the teachers can help the students choose appropriate words, according to the subject and context. This implies that content and language are interrelated, irrespective of the subject the learners are studying. Therefore, in order to promote centrality of language in learning, every teacher needs to be a language teacher.

INTRODUCTION

According to the *National Curriculum Framework (NCF)–2005*, “It is important to view language education as everybody’s concern at schools and not as a responsibility of the language teacher alone.”

Language is a means of communication. It is used to share ideas, convey messages, and express emotions or desires. Some scholars opine that thinking develops only because of language as it helps process thoughts. One acquires a language by

* Professor, Department of Elementary Education, NCERT, New Delhi.

the way of imitation. But to become proficient in it, persistent practise is a must. That is why, 'language' is said to be a 'skill subject', comprising four skills — Learning, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). The acronym SWIRL, which denotes five skills — Speaking, Writing, Interacting, Reading and Listening — is also popularly used to describe language and communication skills.

LANGUAGE IS PERVASIVE

In all school subjects, knowledge and skills, to a large extent, are gained through language. During the teaching-learning process of any subject, say science, social studies or even mathematics, teachers teach and learners read, write, interact and listen to the content. It is, therefore, necessary for the learners to be proficient in the language in which the subjects are being taught so that they are able to understand the concepts better. Equal focus on the language of the subjects provides the learners with new possibilities and opportunities.

Reading and writing are also referred to as 'learning strategies'. So, the teachers must encourage the students to read, write and speak in all subject areas. They must use all opportunities that the curriculum offers in order to develop language skills in the students, for example interpreting, comprehending and analysing, discussing, classifying, problem solving, etc.

Keywords and concepts transcend easily from one subject to another. However, it may be noted there are instances when the same word in one subject may mean something completely different in another, for example, 'cell'. The meaning of this word is different in different subjects or contexts. The word 'cell' denotes a vessel, containing electrodes for current generation, as in a battery. In biology, it means an enclosed cavity in an organism, whereas, in social science, it is used for a small active political group. 'Cell' also means a small room in a prison.

Hence, helping the students understand such words and concepts in varied contexts or subjects, and their usage while communicating makes every teacher a language teacher. However, it is important to note that every teacher need not be a language expert but an expert of the language used in one's subject.

In social sciences, field report writing is an important skill, while in mathematics, reading and comprehending word problems is essential. This holds true for other subjects also. If teachers help students understand important words and language structuring in a subject (for example, lessons, units, assessments, etc.), they develop awareness and are able to use appropriate words while communicating. Hence, the understanding of the students in the subject becomes faster and better.

LANGUAGE ACROSS CURRICULUM — CONCEPT AND NEED

According to the Language Across Curriculum (LAC) approach, language learning must occur throughout the school hours in language, as well as, other subject classes. The approach integrates language and content learning, irrespective of the subject the learners are studying. The learners assimilate new concepts through language. Even while studying in a non-language class, they still use language in the way of listening and talking, and reading and writing. Hence, they enhance their linguistic skills as they learn new concepts in non-linguistic classes.

It is being realised that using course relevant source materials in other languages would prepare the students for cross-cultural and multilingual demands of the emerging society. But the LAC approach is hardly practised in classrooms, majorly due to the pressure of completing the syllabus on time, and lack of flexibility to embrace new teaching methodologies and approaches on the part of teachers. The LAC approach helps the learners in the following ways.

- Improve communication skills
- Learn and understand the content and concepts easily
- Expand their horizon
- Know technical terms and jargon related to various subjects
- Carry out effective self and reference study

NCF-2005 AND LAC

Language education is not confined to language classroom alone. A science, social science or mathematics class is also *ipso facto* (by that meaning) a language class. Learning the subject means learning the terminology, understanding the concepts and being able to discuss and write about the concepts learnt.

The LAC approach is of particular relevance at the primary stage, when children are more adaptive and active. It bridges the gap between 'language as a subject' and 'language as a medium'. However, the foundational role of the skills associated with language is reinforced in school education and continues through life.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE LAC APPROACH

A conventionally trained teacher gives more importance to pronunciation and diction in speech than expression of ideas. If students' talk is treated as a resource rather than as noise, then the cycle of resistance and control may change to that of expression and response. Pre- and in-service teacher education programmes must, therefore, try to introduce such an understanding. Some strategies for promoting the LAC approach are as follows.

- Input rich communication environment (textbooks, other related texts of children's choice, class libraries, TLMs in more than one language and subject)

- Use of multimedia and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Formal training for both pre- and in-service teachers at regular intervals (for example, seminars, workshops, capacity building programmes — face-to-face and online, conferences, field visits, internship programmes, etc.)

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE LAC APPROACH

Introducing LAC requires a thorough change in the mindset of teachers. They must be trained in integrating language with the subject while carrying out classroom teaching.

- The attitude of subject teachers, resisting and objecting to this approach, is a major impediment.
- Many subject teachers do not want to be identified as language teachers. They feel by adopting LAC, they may be identified merely as language teachers.
- Many teachers are reluctant to encourage a cross-curricular approach.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it may be concluded that for promoting centrality of language in learning, every teacher needs to be a language teacher. Language plays a significant role in the teaching and learning of content and subjects. Language learning takes place while learning other subjects as well like science, environmental studies, social science, mathematics, etc. Ideas and content get conveyed and are understood solely through the use of language. The relationship between language and cognition is fundamental to the LAC approach. Hence, it may be said that language:

- is more than merely being a communication skill.
- is linked with the thinking process, and thus, helps shape thoughts and concepts.
- is a tool for conceptualising and linking the acquired information.
- supports precision in cognition.
- helps develop analytical and problem solving skills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING. 2005. *National Curriculum Framework*. NCERT. New Delhi, India.

<https://www.whitbyschool.org/passionforlearning/why-every-teacher-is-a-language-teacher>.

[http://www.bdu.ac.in/cde/docs/ebooks/B Ed/I/LANGUAGE%20ACROSS%20THE%20CURRICULUM.pdf](http://www.bdu.ac.in/cde/docs/ebooks/B%20Ed/I/LANGUAGE%20ACROSS%20THE%20CURRICULUM.pdf)