

Use of Google Classroom to Acquire Pragmatic Skills in Blended Learning

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Abstract

The invention of technology and internet has brought a paradigm shift in English Language Teaching. In the fast moving competitive world mere lecture method in teaching would not be a successful technique to enable the learners acquire pragmatic skills, a necessity for any ESL learner. This paper delineates the process of blended learning, an integration of traditional classroom and online classroom teaching. Google Classroom that is used as a tool for online classroom and a tailor made syllabus, created to cater the needs of second language learners are explicitly explained furthermore.

Introduction

Traditional teaching methods follow teacher-centred training implementing the process of teaching with lectures assisted by visual aids such as PowerPoint presentations, whiteboard and visualisers which may not provide a hands-on experience to the learners. To make the learners acquire the required skill and experience practical knowledge a learner-centred training like Blended learning would really be beneficial.

Blended learning is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace. While students still attend "brick-and-mortar" schools with a teacher present, face-to-face classroom practices are combined with computer-mediated activities regarding content and delivery.

Google Classroom is a recent development of Google for academic institutions and being a component of blended learning which features the creation of announcement, assignments, support of grading schemes, integration of Google calendar, posting of questions for discussion , conduct of tests through Google Docs, Sheets and Slides after each class to test the learner's comprehension, submission of assignments with a deadline and distribution of feedback in a paperless way to the learners. Earlier Google Classroom was associated with institution based email addresses. Therefore, only teachers and students having institute based domain could use Google Classroom. In March 2017, Google opened Classroom to allow any personal Google users to join classes without the requirement of having a G Suite for Education account, and in April, it became possible for any personal Google user to create and teach a class. It is more productive when online digital media combines with traditional classroom method , therefore, making it convenient for the teachers to interact with the students online for asking questions, discussing any topic with teacher and classmates and submitting assignments.

As S. Iftakhar points out,

“Google classroom allows teachers to spend more time with their students and less time on the paperwork, and it is now even better. Google's latest announcement brings new functionality to Google Classroom. Mobile apps, available for iOS and Android devices, let users take photos and attach to assignments, share files from other apps, and access information offline. Teachers can monitor the progress for each student, and after being graded, teachers can return work, along with comments”.

Thomas defined, pragmatic competence as “... the ability to analyze language in a conscious manner.” (as cited in Holmes & Brown, 2007, p 524). Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to comprehend, construct utterances which are accurate and appropriate to the social and cultural circumstances where the communication occurs. The meaning of ideas was only found in the effects and consequences in experience, particularly those consequences brought about through shared experience. Consequently,

pragmatists believed that improving the quality of communication practices was central to improving not only the state of knowledge, but the quality of our experience living together in a common world.

This paper focuses on how a tailor made syllabus could be implemented using Google Classroom in blended learning. The next part of the article reviews few articles in order to finalise the units of the syllabus and how Google Classroom could be used effectively. It is followed by the description of the method that is to be implemented to the students.

Review of Literature

Claudia Harsh in her article ‘Proficiency’ quotes the Bachman and Palmer’s model that communication specifically acknowledges the intertwinedness of pragmatic, textual, strategic and grammatical competences and their mutual dependence on context, persons and purpose.

Husein and Roya in their article confirms that the recent studies in interlanguage pragmatics indicate the need of teaching second language learners the pragmatic conditions governing the use of grammatical structures, mainly because they might not perceive the mismatch between the pragmatic rules of their native language and those of the second language.

Carsten and Saad Al Gahtani pinpoint the definition of Bardovi-Harlig’s (2013: 68) for pragmatics as ‘how-to-say-what-to-whom-when’, which captures neatly the linguistic and cultural sides of language use: learners need to have the linguistic tools available to use language in a range of social situations with a variety of interlocutors. Authors suggest ways on how to adapt the language skills with the social/contextual situation to excel in pragmatic skills.

Hamid and Jahangir in their article meticulously scrutinized the pragmatic knowledge at five macro levels of the ability to perform speech acts, convey and interpret non-literal meaning, perform politeness and discourse functions as well as using cultural knowledge. This gave the researcher an insight of the various constituents of pragmatic competence.

Pragmatics, also known as social language, refers to an individual's ability to use language for a variety of functions (i.e. to request, label, gain attention, greet/part, comment, ask for help, etc), vary language based on audience or setting, and follow rules for conversation. Pragmatics includes the understanding and appropriate use of eye contact, facial expressions, and body language. When having a conversation with someone, one generally initiates with a greeting, introduces a topic, and takes turns commenting. Within that conversation, each person needs to be able to read the other person's tone, facial expressions, eye contact, and nonverbal cues to determine if their partner is still interested, when it is appropriate to interject or add a comment, and when it is time to end the conversation or change the topic.

Rose (2001) in one of his studies argues that “pragmatics consciousness raising is basically an inductive approach to develop a general awareness of how language forms are used appropriately in context” (p. 171). From views of House, Kasper, and Rose (2003), the pragmatics is a type of knowledge that makes people detect the intercultural interaction structures and speech act strategies in order to resolve problems of misunderstanding encountered in the international social settings. NivisDeda MA in the article ‘The role of Pragmatics in English Language Teaching. Pragmatic Competence’ propagates that ‘The teaching of pragmatics aims to facilitate the learners’ sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they encounter. Within second language studies and teaching, pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicature, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use such as choice of address forms.’

Rabbi et. al (2018) in their article discusses the advantages of blended learning platform and how Google Classroom has all the features of it and moreover how it helps the teachers and the learners in the process of learning. It also demonstrates how a techno savvy learner can make use of his/her talents in learning also.

Izwan et.al.in their article elucidates on how Google Classroom can be very effective in the learning process. It also highlights the analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Google Classroom.

This prompted the researcher to consider the components of Pragmatics skill as Speech Acts, Socio-cultural competence, Transactional Competence, Strategic Competence, Discourse Competence and Interactional Competence and use Google Classroom as a tool for blended learning and thereby making the learner's acquire the pragmatic skills.

Methodology

The tailor made syllabus is meant for the first year undergraduates who have difficulty in communicating effectively. The syllabus on Pragmatic skills will focus on Speech Act and Socio-cultural, Transactional, Strategic, Discourse and Interactional competence. Once the Google classroom is created for the learners the syllabus is uploaded. The schedule for the week is informed and few worksheets on speech acts are given for practise. The students go through the worksheets and come prepared for the class. Different situations are given and the students are asked to converse in the class based on the worksheets. The teacher would clarify the learner's doubts providing the learners with plenty of discussion. Assignments can be given to them after each unit. Since speaking skills play a predominant role in pragmatics the assignments can be in the form of audio/video and learners can be asked to record their speech as audio/video and submit it. The teachers can give their feedback for further improvement. Test can also be conducted now and then in the Google Classroom to test their progress and their scores with the right answers for the wrong ones are given immediately. The traditional classroom can be used for discussion and clarification.

Conclusion

The undergraduates who take up the training of this tailor made syllabus for Pragmatics will have a better exposure and hands on experience. Today's learners are technocrats and it is a teacher's duty to make them use it appropriately. Since Google Classroom is also available as a mobile application, it is easy and convenient for the learners to make use of it in acquiring the pragmatic skills. Furthermore, it

enhances the teaching and learning process of language. Thus this paper paves way for further research on using Google classroom for other subjects also.

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