

Using Cartoon: An Integrative Approach to Teaching Multiculturalism and Second Language

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how cartoon can be used as a potential tool to teach multilingual learners and be incorporated as a language teaching material in the curriculum. In addition, the study also discusses that through cartoons, teaching and learning a language will not be the only target to achieve, but also to give exposure to multiculturalism and sharing cultural aspects with the learners at the same time. In this context, multiculturalism is going to be focused in the light of linguistics and language policy and psychological aspects. For this paper, four cartoon videos have been the primary sources of data to establish the importance of cartoons in teaching and learning of a language.

Furthermore, for the purpose of analysis four cartoons from four different countries have been selected. The cartoons are in German and Spanish languages produced in Germany and Spain respectively; and Japanese and Swahili languages produced in Japan and Kenya respectively. The study has observed that cartoon can be utilized as an important tool in learning a language, and has found that appropriate employment of cartoons can be a useful strategy to teach and exchange multiculturalism, which, in turn, will assist learners to understand the target language in the context of target culture.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Multilingualism; Multicultural Education, Use of Cartoons, Constructivism

Introduction

Language is not only a media of communication, rather it is also a means of relaying cultures from one part to another part of the world. In addition, language learning does not only include its grammatical aspects, but also how it is encoded and decoded in real life situations. In such a phase of language usage, the users of the language, both language instructor and learners, need to have a good understanding of native speakers' culture and custom, where language plays the role of a weapon to uphold the essence of that particular culture. Apart from knowing the culture in which the target language is rooted, it would be like accepting a skeleton as a human being without flesh and blood.

From psychological perspective, it is observed that if the lessons of a language class are contextualized, learners comprehend and remember the lessons better, and they can also apply their knowledge in future in a similar context in their real-life situation. The study opines that teaching and learning a language through cartoons can be a useful approach.

Literature Review

Before analyzing the significance of cartoon as a teaching-learning tool, an overview of the relevant concepts like multiculturalism, multicultural education, and teachers' and students' attitude towards multicultural education may be useful to understand the fabric of the issue in question.

The concept of multiculturalism was first officially emerged in connection with the cultural, ethnic, social, and political demands of the national minorities and immigrants in the program of the Trudeau administration in Canada in 1971 (Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Guo, 2011). The concept of multiculturalism later rolled out in Australia and the United States of America too, and Sweden officially adopted the concept in 1975 (Canatan, 2009; Yanık, 2013). However, the discourse of multiculturalism emerged as a civil movement in 1960s in the USA that turned into a political movement within the context of civil rights that grew unprecedentedly especially to protect Afro-Americans' own rights (Kahn, 2008; Ramsey, 2008; Thomas, 1994). Hence, the concept of multiculturalism instigated new social, political, cultural, and educational definitions to be made (Yilmaz, 2016).

In addition, multiculturalism is based on the principle and concept of nation state which emphasizes regional, linguistic, and cultural union. It has been accepted as a response to the management of nation state by subsuming the cultural diversity within the political community (Journet, 2009; Kastoryano, 2009, in Yilmaz, 2016). Similarly, it comes across as a phenomenon that involves the idea of "humanism, human rights and equal civil rights" as well as being a "new political process" (Qi, 2011). It is also a natural concept that emerges from the coexistence of nations coming from different roots in terms of language, religion, nationality, culture, history, and geography (Anık, 2012; Çoban, 2010). Thus, multiculturalism is associated with cultural diversity or differences that have been blended into culture (Parekh, 2000). Referring to how multiculturalism evolves, Delanty (2002) has observed that the primary goal of the multicultural model is that it renews itself in accordance with the contemporary requirements of democracy and the right claims (pp.60-66). Analyzing the dynamics of multiculturalism, some researchers (Banks & Banks, 2010; Parekh, 2000) have noted that multiculturalism, in which the social structure is not uniform and at the same time, different identities and cultures coexist, differences are not regarded as conflicts but a source of richness, provides for the change of society (Banks & Banks, 2010; Parekh, 2000, in Yilmaz, 2016). Emphasizing the needs of multicultural education, some studies have prescribed that embracing, internalizing differences, and accepting them as a way of life is only possible through a multicultural education (Arnow, 2001; Fowers & Davidov, 2006, in Yilmaz, 2016).

Multicultural education as an educational movement dates back to the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s. It is an intellectual metamorphosis, a reformist movement, and a process. Its basic idea is that all students have the equality of opportunities in education without being subjected to racial, ethnic, social class, or gender discrimination (Banks, 2001a, 2001b; Mwonga, 2005). This reformist approach advocates the transformation of schools, the fact that every student benefits from educational opportunities equally, the improvement and sustainability of democracy, and the sustainability of liberal, fair, and equalitarian social structure (Gorski, 2009; Kim, 2011; Polat, 2009). It indicates that all students who adopt the multicultural education mentality should be facilitated with an academic environment with equal opportunities regardless of their races, ethnicities, languages, religions, genders, cultural backgrounds, sociocultural status, and sexual orientations. To establish a formula of multicultural education, researchers (Açıkalın, 2010; Ameny-Dixon, 2013; Banks & Banks, 2010; Ceyhan, 2012; Gay & Howard, 2000; Kahn, 2008) have made efforts to recommend that by providing the social justice, creating the equality of opportunities in education, getting to know different cultures and being unbiased toward them,

reflecting the effect of culture on the education environment, and organizing the school programs according to multicultural principles are accepted to be the dimensions of multicultural education. In this circumstance, teachers need to play a significant role with huge responsibilities to comply with the above-mentioned formula of multicultural education. Attitudes and behaviors of teachers directly affect students and may cause them to exhibit either positive or negative behaviors and attitudes towards multicultural education (Yilmaz, 2016). Teachers' attitude toward multicultural education contributes to the critical thinking abilities and awareness of teachers (Gorski, 2009). Teachers become open to cooperation by means of multicultural education (Téllez, 2008); at the same time, there is a decline in racist attitudes of students who have received multicultural education and cultural awareness is created among university students through multicultural education and their prejudice is overcome (Wright & Tolan, 2009).

This study has focused on cartoon as a primary source of data, through which teachers can take an initiative to teach new language and culture to the Bangladeshi learners at tertiary level.

As an almost monolingual country, in Bangladesh there is an inadequacy of studies on the necessity of multicultural education and its long-term impacts. Taking this dearth into consideration, it is expected that this study is going to put light on the importance of multiculturalism, multicultural education, and their positive effects in the field of higher study in countries like Bangladesh. In addition, the study is also going to emphasize the importance of teacher-student attitude towards multicultural education.

Along with many conventional teaching and learning tools, in this digital era, teachers and students both enjoy the facility of accessing to many other digital and updated instruments for the benefit of language teaching and learning. One of them is cartoon site, which has both audio and visual qualities that can be used as a useful tool for teaching and learning a language.

Highlighting the importance of authentic learning materials, Nunan (1999), has pointed out that it is necessary for second language learners to be exposed to authentic learning material, because it motivates them through making interconnection between the content of that authentic material and the topic which is being discussed. In addition, it enables learners to connect between the learning atmosphere in the classroom and real world. Various audiovisual learning instruments could be employed as the potential sources of authentic language input, such as T.V programs, videos or cartoons. Animated cartoons as a source of authentic audiovisual material have proven its effectiveness in second language learning and acquisition (Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016).

In addition, animated cartoon, as an authentic material, has been considered as an effective tool that assists language learning, mainly, in EFL learning context, as it clarifies abstract concepts and add humor to a topic, which provide a positive psychological impact on the learners (Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016). Keogh and Naylor (1996) are the first ones to believe that utilization of cartoon as an educational tool has an immediate impact in the classroom. Both of them have felt to encourage teachers to use purposeful approach to practical and instant influence in the classroom. It has been emphasized that the concept of cartoon served second language learning process, by offering several developments, such as, a shift from negatively-worded to positively-worded statements and a transfer from usage of single alternatives to multiple alternatives. When teachers use animated cartoon as an educational tool in language classroom, it not only does influence second language learners' performance, but the methodology of utilizing cartoon also carries a positive impact on the whole teaching and learning process when it is associated with creative teaching strategies (Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016).

So the aim of this paper is to discuss how cartoon, as a pedagogical material, can be employed in language classroom from a constructivist point of view with a target to introduce multiculturalism.

Theoretical Background of Constructivism

Constructivism is a key notion in the developmental process not only of language learning issues but also in the development process in any other field. Constructivist Approach is defined as “teaching and learning approach that is based on students' active participation in problem-solving and critical thinking regarding a learning activity which they find relevant and engaging”. (<https://constructivismnelt.wikispaces.com>). Phillips (2000) has pointed out many constructivist traditions. He focuses on the theoretical framework of the two most popular constructivist who tackled the constructivist approach and they are, first of all, personal constructivism attributed to Jean Piaget and secondly, social constructivism associated with Lev Vygotsky. Piaget, the founder of the constructivism, argues in his theory that humans can generate their knowledge and meaning by interaction between their own experiences and ideas. When an individual is exposed to new experience, he or she filters the concepts through a mental structural process (Schemata) which correlates an individual's previous knowledge, perspectives or beliefs with new concepts he gets (Phillips 2000). Furthermore, Piaget (1973) theorizes that understanding is produced by discovery. Unless an individual understands he or she will mainly depend on repetition. As a result, learner would lose innovation and productivity. On the other hand, Vygotsky's (as cited in Rice & Wilson 1999) sociocultural theory possibly gives the most credence at the children's cultural background and their interactions with peers which probably has its significance on the child's overall cognitive development – zone proximal development (ZPD). He believes that cultural and social perspectives have an influence on the child's mental development. Vygotsky has presented the concept of the zone of proximal development which mainly focuses on the difference of child's capability of accomplishment in isolation than that which can be accomplished with assistance. Furthermore, a child has better ability to solve and dissect complicated structures at a particular age of mental development if he gets an assistant from teachers, peers or parents than that he can do separately (Rice & Wilson, 1999 in Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016).

In addition, Constructivism is based on constructing knowledge by making interconnection between learner's previous experience and that knowledge he or she receives from a social interaction. According to Dewey (1997), learning is an action where knowledge and ideas are promoted by interaction with other learners in a social context. As a result, they would draw conclusions by connecting their previous experiences which have significance and a sense with that knowledge they get while investigating. Dewey also believes that a child's cognitive development is enhanced through social interaction in a community. He also describes that a child is by nature motivated to learn actively, and the education he gets, facilitates his learning and makes it more possible.

The constructivism approach reinforces the individual creation of knowledge and structuring new concepts. Constructivist approach assumes that a learner's existing knowledge is of great importance in the learning and in that process, which occurs through cognitive and social interaction (Matthews, 1997). Based on Vygotsky's theory (1978), cartoons enable learners to socially interact which helps in the cognitive process of language learning. However, numerous factors affect successful acquisition of second or foreign language. Gardner's socio-economic model (1982) identifies various factors which are interrelated within the process of learning a second language. Gardner has noted that these include, “the social and cultural milieu, age, attitude,

etc., the setting or context in which learning takes individual learner differences, motivation, place. Cartoons, if used carefully, can accommodate most of the factors. Children are particularly interested in cartoons. Rate and success of second language acquisition are strongly influenced by the age of the learner”. However, cartoon can also be a potential media for adult EFL learners (Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016).

To give a framed shape Constructivist Design Model, Gagnon and Collay (2006) develop the model of constructivist approach which consists of six elements that must be considered while preparing a lesson plan. The elements focus on constructive activities that allow learners to develop critical thinking towards the content learning material rather than teacher’s demonstrative behavior in the classroom. Most teachers’ classical lesson plans concentrate on oral instruction or visual demonstration of the learning topic, which is usually followed by students’ practice, however, constructivist approach grants the students the opportunity of discovering knowledge. The six elements of the constructivist approach were designed to promote teacher’s ability to construct activities that provoke students’ curiosity and skills to discover knowledge. These six elements are the followings, for example, a) situation, in which teacher develops the situation for students to explain), b) grouping, where teacher organizes groups and selects the process of grouping, c) bridge, when teacher builds the bridge between students’ prior experiences and what they might learn while tackling the lesson, d) questions, when teacher tries to provoke students to ask guiding questions, e) exhibit, when students present their findings and conclusions, f) reflections, which includes students’ reflections on their learning (Abuzahra, Farrah & Zalloum, 2016).

These six steps should also be followed in planning an EFL lesson. In addition, teacher should also give emphasis to these steps while including cartoon as a digital tool in their conventional teaching strategy. As a positive outcome, the lesson will be more effective through audio-visual quality of cartoon. Students will have better reflection on their learned knowledge and implement it in their real-life situation.

Methodology

This study has followed qualitative method to collect and to analyze the data. The participants have been taken from four online ELT and writing courses at a private university located in the capital city of Bangladesh, and their experiences of having cartoon as a learning tool have been collected in written form through emails as a primary source of data. In this study, the responses of the participants have been analyzed by using their given pseudonyms. The content analysis of the secondary sources has also been taken into consideration in drawing conclusion.

Finding and Discussion

The participants of this study have expressed their opinions and perspectives about online learning experiences during this pandemic situation in 2020, and in answering one of the questions regarding cartoon as a learning tool, they have pointed out different views. For example, a participant named Ramia has mentioned,

“Cartoon is a form of expression that conveys a lot of information in very few words... .” She has also pointed out, *“We needed to work on cartoons while writing two of our term papers in ENG208[sic]. It was so amazing to use animated cartoons in our term paper. Besides, normally while writing any paper or assignment we feel so much pressurized and tensed. However, as we worked on some animated movies the boredom did not come.*

Moreover, it gave us pleasure and chill while working on those cartoons. In fact, I spent quality time while writing the paper”.

In addition, another participant, Waheda from the same course has opined that cartoon helps meet up the curiosity of learners by providing a new experience and excitement, and thus minimize the boredom of learning a new language and lesson,

“I really appreciate these types of activities which are creative and made our hard lessons so much easy. Sometimes, we learn more interesting things out of the selected topic and sometimes we also invent few sides which increases more curiosity to study further”.

Expressing her positive view about using cartoon in language class, another participant, Nira has mentioned about impacts of using cartoon in an ELT course, for example, cartoon helps

“...learn many new words and stories; increase knowledge; and has a positive impact on the mind”.

So was the opinion of Isma who has found cartoon as a very useful tool for developing multicultural aspects. She puts her own experience of getting cartoons as learning materials:

“...cartoon plays an important role to build up a relationship between the subjects and the learners. Mainly, cartoons helps [sic] us to learn collaborative learning, social skills, critical thinking, communicational skills, small group learning and so on”.

She has also mentioned,

“... cartoons can give us information and positive messages about a culture. One can learn about different culture through the cartoons and it will increase one’s knowledge about cultural things. It has been seen that one of the best methods to teach about something is using cartoons. Therefore, it was really helpful for us to understand a topic more clearly and learn new things through cartoons in Eng102 course”.

Farhana has talked about how cartoon motivates students by providing information about multiculturalism. According to her, cartoons

“... are inspiring, helpful, and heart-warming. Eventually, those videos helped a lot in my course and my studies also. On the contrary, if we saw some more informative, motivational videos that would also help us in our studies. Apart from that, all are commendable”.

Another participant, Avro has given his in-depth analysis of the impact of cartoon:

“Cartoons now become a tool of education for both the kids and the aged one. Schools & universities are also showing cartoons to their students for educational purposes. Cartoon portraits many ethical, social, moral values through their storyline...”.

Highlighting his sense of multiculturalism, Avro continues:

“...the cartoon is also developing multiculturalism. “Multiculturalism” is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles. There are many short animated movies and cartoons which are mixed with different cultural values. Cartoons show how things may differ from culture to culture and how culture reflects everything and how everything is building by the culture”.

Avro, has also pointed out,

“By watching cartoons one can also learn how different cultural societies adopt new cultures to survive in this drastically changing world. To conclude, not only kids but also teenagers can learn about many different cultural values, regional values through cartoons and develop their knowledge”.

However, a few students have also talked about the other side of the coin. Regarding the compatibility of cartoons for use in classrooms in different cultural setting, they have felt that some issues that need to be considered by the course instructors. For instance, while selecting cartoons as texts in ELT course for multicultural education, teachers also need to give equal emphasis to focus on learners’ own culture so that the learners do not feel hard and harsh dissonance between the text (cartoon) and their comprehensibility. In this study, it has also been observed that participants, who have watched animated cartoon film, have been also looking for themes and morals from their own culture. At the same time, they have been looking for easier information in the cartoon. For instance, Mana has mentioned,

"Pip is an animated short film. Undoubtedly, the moral of the film has an aesthetic concept and teaches us a good lesson but at the same time for me, this short film is quite perplexing to understand. Moreover, when I watched the film for the first time I could not understand the gist until my faculty explained it”..

Conclusion

From the above-mentioned analysis it can be derived that in an era of digitalization the light of digitalization has enriched teaching and learning domain, and cartoon being a product of digitalized world can be considered as a useful media to upgrade multicultural education in multicultural countries as well as in monolingual countries, like Bangladesh. Duly selected cartoons can be considered as an effective medium to provide multiculturalism, and as a terminal outcome, it may help exchange of culture with student across national and geographical borders. Additionally, it may provide the students of monolingual nations with an opportunity to get exposure to cultural diversity to make them fit for the very fluid global needs. However, in preparing lesson plan using cartoon as an instrument, special consideration should be given to the learners’ nationalism and own culture, and must not have any conflict. A balanced admixture of learners’ own cultural uniqueness and the values imported through cartoons has to be ensured so that learners do not feel humiliated and marginalized. A sense of inclusiveness should prevail in the learning situation.

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