



The Importance of Combining Functional Literacy and Pragmatics in English Language Teaching: A Secondary School Perspective

L'importance de combiner l'apprentissage fonctionnel et la pragmatique dans l'enseignement de l'anglais : Perspective de l'enseignement secondaire

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Abstract:

The article discusses the importance of combining functional literacy and pragmatics in English language teaching. By teaching relevant language skills, educators can help students develop critical thinking and communication skills necessary to succeed in both personal and professional contexts. The article emphasizes the practical applications of this approach and highlights the importance of teaching English as a communication tool for real-life situations.

Key words: functional literacy, pragmatics, critical thinking, real-life situations, social and cultural factors, communicative competence

Résumé:

L'article discute de l'importance de combiner l'apprentissage fonctionnel et la pragmatique dans l'enseignement de l'anglais. En enseignant les compétences linguistiques appropriés, les éducateurs peuvent aider les élèves à développer la pensée critique et les compétences de communication nécessaires pour réussir dans des contextes personnels et professionnels. L'article met l'accent sur les applications pratiques de cette approche et souligne l'importance de l'enseignement de l'anglais comme outil de communication dans des situations réelles.

Mots Clefs : l'apprentissage fonctionnel, pragmatique, pensée critique, situations réelles, facteurs sociale et culturel, compétence communicative

Functional literacy can be defined as the ability to read, write, and understand written information in a way that enables individuals to perform tasks that are necessary for daily living and functioning in society (UNESCO 2005).

Also, functional literacy goes beyond basic reading and writing skills and encompasses the ability to comprehend and apply information in practical situations. This includes being able to understand written instructions, complete forms, read and comprehend important information such as warning labels, and communicate effectively through written means such as email or text messaging (Green & Chen 2014).

Additionally, functional literacy also involves the development of critical thinking skills, such as the ability to evaluate and analyze written information, draw conclusions, and make informed decisions based on that information. In today's rapidly changing world, functional literacy is becoming increasingly important for individuals to succeed in both their personal and professional lives (Street 1984).

Pragmatics can be defined as the study of how language is used in context to convey meaning beyond the literal interpretation of words. Pragmatics involves the analysis of the social and cultural factors that influence communication aka. discourse analysis, including the speaker's intentions, the listener's expectations, and the context in which the communication takes place (Mey 1993). Pragmatics encompasses a wide range of communicative functions, such as making requests, giving directions, expressing politeness, and conveying sarcasm. It also involves understanding the different levels of meaning conveyed through non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1996).

Introducing pragmatics in English lessons can help students develop their communicative competence, enabling them to use language effectively in a variety of social contexts (Verschueren, Östman & Blommaert 1995). By teaching pragmatics, educators can help students understand the nuances of language use and develop the skills necessary to communicate with greater accuracy, clarity, and cultural sensitivity.

It is quite important to recognize the practical applications of pragmatics within the context of functional literacy (Cutting 2002). Functional literacy and pragmatics can be connected in English lessons by focusing on teaching English as a communication tool for real-life situations. Functional literacy refers to the ability to use language effectively in practical situations, while pragmatics is concerned with how context influences meaning in communication. By combining these two areas of study, educators can help students develop the critical thinking and communication skills necessary to succeed in both personal and professional contexts.

There are many examples of how to teach language in a context. In fact, teaching language in a context is a fundamental approach to language instruction and is used in many different methods and approaches to language teaching.

Here are some common approaches of how language can be taught in context (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow 2014):

Content-based instruction: This approach to language teaching focuses on teaching language through subject matter, such as science, social studies, or literature. The language is taught in the context of the subject matter, which makes the learning more meaningful and relevant to the students.

Task-based language teaching (Long & Robinson 2011): In this approach, language is taught through the completion of specific tasks, such as ordering food in a restaurant or asking for directions. The language is taught in the context of the task, which helps students understand the purpose of the language they are learning.

Project-based learning, which involves students working on a project that requires them to use English to research, collaborate, and present their findings. This approach not only teaches language in context but also develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Communicative language teaching: This approach emphasizes the importance of communication and uses authentic communication situations as the context for language learning. For example, students might have to negotiate with each other to plan a vacation, or discuss current events in small groups (Richards & Renandya 2002).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): In this approach, students learn both language and content in a single integrated lesson. For example, students might learn about a historical event in English, or study science in a second language.

Total Physical Response (TPR): This approach uses physical movement and gestures to help students learn and remember vocabulary and grammar in context. For example, students might act out a story or play a game that requires them to use language in context.

We have to admit here that the key is to find a method or approach that works best for your students and the language skills you want them to develop. The above-mentioned approaches all share the common goal of teaching language in context and helping students develop the critical thinking and communication skills necessary to succeed in real-life situations. However, it's important to remember that each approach may require different strategies to be effective. For example, one effective strategy for incorporating functional literacy and pragmatics into English lessons is using authentic materials such as news articles, advertisements, and TV shows to teach language in context. This will help students learn how to use English in real-life situations and understand how language is used in different contexts (Kessler & McBride 2017).

Other strategies may include role-playing or simulations, encouraging reflection on communication strategies and outcomes, or providing opportunities for collaborative learning. By using these strategies within different approaches to language teaching, educators can create engaging and effective English lessons that prepare students for success both inside and outside the classroom (Mishan 2005). There are some of them in detail:

Use authentic materials: Authentic materials refer to any materials that are produced for real-life communication purposes, such as newspapers, advertisements, TV shows, movies, songs, and podcasts. Here are some examples of how authentic materials can be used in language teaching:

Reading and listening comprehension: Authentic materials can be used to improve students' reading and listening comprehension skills. For example, teachers can use newspaper articles, short stories, or podcasts as a basis for comprehension questions or discussion activities.

Vocabulary building: Authentic materials can also be used to build students' vocabulary. For example, teachers can create vocabulary activities based on words and phrases found in songs or TV shows.

Writing practice: Authentic materials can be used to provide students with models for writing in the target language. For example, students can analyze the structure and language features of a news article, and then use these as a model for their own writing.

Cultural awareness: Authentic materials can be used to expose students to the culture of the target language. For example, teachers can use TV shows, movies, or songs to introduce students to cultural practices, customs, and beliefs.

Speaking and conversation practice: Authentic materials can also be used to facilitate speaking and conversation practice. For example, teachers can use videos or audio recordings as a basis for role-play or discussion activities.

Overall, the use of authentic materials can provide students with exposure to real-world language use and help them develop language skills that are relevant and applicable to their lives outside of the classroom.

Effective communication involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear and respectful manner. To teach effective communication, educators can incorporate a variety of speaking strategies into their language teaching. For example, students can practice using English in real-life situations through role-plays and simulations to build their confidence in using English. There are many examples of communication strategies that can be taught to help individuals improve their communication skills (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012). Here are a few examples:

Active Listening: This involves giving your full attention to the person speaking, showing interest, and providing feedback to the speaker. Active listening can be taught through exercises such as repeating what the speaker said or asking clarifying questions.

Non-Verbal Communication: This involves using body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice to convey a message. Non-verbal communication can be taught through role-playing exercises or by practicing in front of a mirror.

Assertiveness: This involves expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear and respectful manner. Assertiveness can be taught through exercises such as using "I" statements, role-playing, and practicing saying "no" in different scenarios.

Conflict Resolution: This involves resolving conflicts in a constructive and positive manner. Conflict resolution can be taught through exercises such as role-playing, discussing different conflict resolution strategies, and practicing active listening.

Cultural Awareness: This involves understanding and respecting different cultural norms and values. Cultural awareness can be taught through education, discussion, and exposure to different cultures.

To further develop students' speaking skills, educators can incorporate role-plays and simulations into their language teaching. Through these activities, students can practice using English in real-life situations and build their confidence in using the language (Alatis, Widdowson & Chatfield 1982). Below are a few examples of role plays and simulations that can be used in English lessons. The key is to choose scenarios that are relevant and engaging for the students, and to provide feedback and guidance throughout the role play or simulation to help students improve their language skills.

Job Interview Simulation: Students can prepare for job interviews by role-playing as the interviewer and the interviewee. They can practice common interview questions and learn how to answer them effectively.

Restaurant Role Play: Students can practice ordering food and drinks, making reservations, and asking for the check in a restaurant setting. They can also learn how to handle different scenarios, such as a complaint from a customer.

Travel Agent Simulation: Students can role-play as a travel agent and a customer, practicing how to book a flight, hotel, and other travel arrangements. They can also learn how to give recommendations and handle different travel-related questions.

Negotiation Simulation: Students can practice negotiating in different scenarios, such as a business deal, a real estate transaction, or a salary negotiation. They can learn how to make offers, counteroffers, and reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

Customer Service Simulation: Students can role-play as a customer service representative and a customer, practicing how to handle different customer inquiries and complaints. They can also learn how to provide effective solutions and maintain a positive attitude.

Educators should also teach students about cultural norms and how they affect communication in English. For example, we can teach students about the use of politeness strategies in English and how they vary across cultures. Here are some of the other examples on how to introduce and combine functional literacy and pragmatics in the English teaching context (Behrens & Parker 2019).

Understanding cultural references: Functional literacy involves the ability to read and understand written text, while pragmatics focuses on how language is used in social contexts. Cultural references are a prime example of how these two skills intersect. For example, if a text mentions a popular cultural icon, such as a musician or athlete, understanding the reference requires familiarity with the cultural norms surrounding that icon.

Appropriate language use: Pragmatics emphasizes the importance of using language appropriately in different contexts. This includes being aware of cultural norms around language use, such as polite forms of address and appropriate language for different social situations. Functional literacy is essential for understanding written rules and guidelines for language use, such as workplace manuals or codes of conduct.

Nonverbal communication: Pragmatics also includes understanding nonverbal communication, such as body language and facial expressions, which can vary widely across different cultures. Functional literacy can help in understanding written

materials about nonverbal communication norms, such as guidelines for appropriate eye contact or hand gestures.

Multicultural perspectives: Combining functional literacy and pragmatics also requires an awareness of multicultural perspectives. Functional literacy skills can be used to research and understand cultural norms and practices, while pragmatic skills can be used to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. This includes understanding the nuances of communication in different cultural contexts and adapting one's communication style accordingly.

Sensitivity to diversity: A focus on the intersection of functional literacy and pragmatics requires sensitivity to diversity. This involves being aware of the potential for cultural biases in written materials and language use, and making efforts to overcome them. It also means being open to learning about and respecting different cultural perspectives, and being willing to adapt one's communication style to promote effective cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, the combination of functional literacy and pragmatics can help individuals communicate effectively and respectfully in diverse cultural contexts.

By applying the afore-mentioned approaches and strategies, educators can help their students develop critical thinking and communication skills necessary for success both inside and outside the classroom while also promoting functional literacy and pragmatics (National Association of Secondary School Principals 2007).

The importance of functional literacy and pragmatics in English language teaching cannot be overstated. Functional literacy, which involves the ability to read, write, and understand written information in practical situations, is increasingly vital for success in both personal and professional contexts. Pragmatics, on the other hand, explores the nuances of language use and the cultural and social factors that influence communication. By combining the two, English language educators can help students develop communicative competence, enabling them to use language effectively in a variety of social contexts.

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