Microstrategies for Enhancing Literary and Communicative Competence in English Literary Studies

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ABSTRACT:

It is high time that the world of L2 teaching avoids any one particular method or approach and instead focuses not on learners but on learning. Over a quarter of a century ago, a loud proclamation was made that there was no best method. This was followed by an assertion that it was an era of post-method pedagogy in L2 teaching. This paper shares some microstrategies that can be used to develop the literary and communicative competence of students studying English literature. These microstrategies are based on the premise that while there may be certain basic guidelines to nurture a child, every parent would have their own style and strategy to rear a child. Similarly, language teaching in the post-method era also follows a similar premise. The teacher can be well-versed in the pros and cons of each method, but at the end of the day, every teacher works out a strategy to help learners achieve their goals.

Keywords: Postmethod Pedagogy, Literary Studies, L2 Teaching, Microstrategies

Introduction:

The development of literary and communicative competence is essential for learners of English literature. It involves the necessary skills and knowledge to engage critically with literary texts – which requires more than just comprehension of the plot or characters. It necessitates a comprehensive set of skills, including interpretation, analysis, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively. Literary studies offer a unique opportunity for students to explore and analyze various forms of literature, including novels, plays, poems, and short stories. It allows them to delve into the rich cultural and linguistic nuances embedded within these texts. The development of the required skills and competencies, in turn, calls for the implementation of specific instructional techniques within the classroom setting.

It has been almost a quarter of a century since the shift from the conventional method towards the concept of the "postmethod condition" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) was envisioned and the proclamation was made that methods go through endless cycles of life, death, and rebirth (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), suggesting that methods are nothing but recycled and repackaged ideas. A decade before that, it was also stated that there was no best method (Prabhu, 1990). Since then, teachers have been making efforts, within their capacity, to make L2 teaching more effective. The major principles of postmethod pedagogy include constructing classroom-oriented theories of practice, generating location-specific classroom-oriented innovative practices, and searching not for an alternative method but an alternative to the method.

Postmethod pedagogy focuses more on learning than on language or learners. Desired learning should take place irrespective of the method or approach used. The onus of making this happen lies mainly on teachers as they face the realities of the classroom. The teacher, once again,

becomes the strongest and/or the weakest link. Teachers of every generation have faced common challenges, tried to devise various techniques, and endeavoured to identify solutions. Teachers in the 21st century cannot escape from the age-old challenges. While many challenges have been addressed, solutions have also generated newer challenges. Hence, this cycle of identifying challenges, addressing them, and the generation of new challenges has become a cyclic process, much like the human cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

This research paper aims to present a collection of microstrategies specifically designed for a course in literary studies. These microstrategies align with the framework proposed by B. Kumaravadivelu (1994) and address the three Ps — Pedagogy of Particularity, Pedagogy of Practicality, and Pedagogy of Possibility — suggested by him. By implementing these strategies, educators can effectively enhance the teaching and learning experience in the field of literary studies.

B. Kumaravadivelu (1994) proposed a framework consisting of 10 macrostrategies, aiming to redefine the relationship between theorists and practitioners in the field of language teaching. The intention was to provide a comprehensive guideline to assist L2 teachers in identifying relevant microstrategies or classroom techniques that are specific to their particular teaching contexts and learners' needs. Before delving into the discussion of microstrategies applicable to the tertiary level in Literary Studies, it is important to shed light on the unique qualities of learners, contexts, and goals within this domain. These microstrategies not only facilitate language learning but also foster the development of literary and communicative competence, ultimately contributing to the holistic growth of students' personalities.

A. Understanding (uni)quality of Learners in English at Tertiary Level with respect to Linguistic and Literary Competence

Learners enrolled in a postgraduate course in English represent a microcosm of the student community, encompassing three distinct categories. The composition of these categories may differ depending on the specific course, institution, university, and region.

a. The Enlightened Ones: These students possess a high level of fluency and accuracy in English. They demonstrate both receptive and productive competence, making them well-equipped to engage with complex tasks. As their teacher, the role is more of a coach, focusing on refining their skills, addressing any areas of improvement, and guiding them to further enhance their linguistic abilities.

b. The Known Ignorant Ones: This group acknowledges their lack of knowledge and actively seeks to expand their language proficiency and literary competence. They require significant effort and motivation to overcome their limitations. It is crucial to provide them with ample support and create a conducive learning environment to build their confidence and foster a can-do attitude. With proper guidance, training, and motivation, these students have the potential to join the ranks of proficient learners.

c. The Lost Generation: They are disengaged learners. This category comprises students who are aware of their lack of knowledge but lack the motivation or interest to pursue language learning. They may have joined the course due to external factors or a lack of clear career aspirations. Their sole focus is often on obtaining the required qualification without genuine

enthusiasm for the subject. While it may be challenging to inspire this group, a teacher can maintain an optimistic outlook and strive to change their attitude. Succeeding in making a positive impact on these learners would be a remarkable achievement and a testament to the teacher's dedication and skill.

B. Understanding (Uni)quality of Context of Learning Course in English:

Backgrounds and circumstances of schooling and graduation of learning of students joining the PG Course in English extremely vary. Broadly, they can be divided into two:

a. Challenged Background: Students belonging to this background have had limited exposure to quality educational institutions and lacked proper guidance and direction throughout their schooling. As a result, their learning experiences have been less comprehensive, leading to a comparatively lower level of linguistic, literary, and communicative competence. Some of these learners may also have experienced demotivation. It is the responsibility of the teacher to focus on developing their foundational skills and knowledge in language, literature, and communication.

b. Privileged Background: This group of students has had the advantage of favourable circumstances in their educational journey. They come from well-educated families, have financial stability, and have been exposed to various enriching experiences. These students have benefited from admission to reputable institutions and have made the most of their opportunities. Within this group, there are students who have excelled and are prepared to further enhance their abilities, as well as those who, due to various reasons, could not fully capitalize on their advantages.

C. Understanding (Uni)quality of Career Goals

Based on the career avenues (academic, administrative, or non-traditional ones) available to the students, the goals of the learners in a PG course in English would be the following:

Table 1: Goals of a Learner having English as a Major at the Tertiary Level

Major Goals	Careers				
	Academic			Administrative	Non Traditional Ones
	School	Teritary			
		Literature	Applied use of English		
To develop competency in using the English language accurately for personal and professional purposes	√	√	√	√	√
To get adequate knowledge of the literature written in English around the globe		√			

Major Goals	Careers				
	Academic			Administrative	Non Tradi-tional Ones
	School	Teritary			
		Litera-ture	Applied use of English		
To understand the nuances of designing curriculum, teaching-learning process and testing	√	√	√		
To be familiar with the allied use of the English language in communi-cation	√	√	√	√	√
To understand the use of English for Specific Purposes	√	√	√	√	√

An English teacher has to devise strategies for the development of linguistic, literary and communicative competence in English to achieve the stated goals. Teaching a wide range of content within a limited timeframe can be challenging, especially when students have varying levels of proficiency. While some students may excel in higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), others may struggle with lower-order thinking skills (LOTS). As a result, it becomes crucial for teachers to navigate this disparity and devise effective strategies accordingly. In such a scenario the following opportunities can be created for the learners and modified based on the learning from their execution of the same. With the initial understanding of their proficiency and goals, efforts can be made to utilize the text as the springboard to launch classroom activities. The strategic framework, for L2 teaching (B Kumaravadivelu, 1994) can be followed while using these microstrategies. Depending upon the need of the students and the strategy, a teacher can be a guide, coach or facilitator. To exemplify the implementation of microstrategies, the text *One Day in the Season of Rain* by Mohan Rakesh, a prominent work in Indian Writings in English Translation, is chosen.

Macrostrategy 1: Maximising Learning Opportunities

Microstrategy 1: SUMMARY and RECAP

Role of the Teacher : A Facilitator

Objective: Creating opportunities for the learner's participation by integrating language skills and fostering language awareness and literary understanding.

Suggested Course of Action	a. Each lecture ends with a summary of the discussed topics and activities and begins with a recap of the previous class.
	b. Two coordinators are assigned at the beginning of the course to ensure equal participation for every student in the activities.
	c. The coordinators, in coordination with the teacher, formulate effective strategies for student participation (individual or team-based) and determine appropriate rewards (such as recognition on the notice board, certificates etc). Active participation in the activities is mandatory for all students to ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute to the best of his/her capacity.
	d. The listeners have the opportunity to raise queries, which can be addressed by either the speaker or the teacher. Active participation can be ensured by encouraging at least one query from the students
Possible Outcomes:	Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would
	a. enhance clarity among learners regarding the topics and activities discussed in the class.
	b. provide absent students with an overview of the content missed during their absence.
	c. reinforce learning through repetition, aiding in better retention of information.
	d. foster students' understanding and ability to differentiate between the perception and key features of a good presentation.
	e. enable the teacher to gain insights into the students' perceptions and perspectives.

Macrostrategy 2: Facilitating Negotiated Interaction
Microstrategy 2: Group Discussion (after the completion of the discussion of the text)·
Who do you think is responsible for Mallika's suffering? Why?·
Who do you think is responsible for Kalidas's suffering? Why?

Role of the Teacher	: Coach
Objective :	Encouraging Critical Thinking Skills by Integrating Language Skills and Fostering Language Awareness
Suggested Course of Action	a. The teacher identifies critical issues from the text.
	b. The class is divided into groups based on the number of students and topics.
	c. Each group is assigned a topic, preferably of their choice.
	d. The groups plan, discuss, and analyze various perspectives

related to their topic by conducting research, understanding the study material, and identifying supporting evidence from the text.

e. The teacher actively observes and monitors their discussions, providing input and guidance as needed.

f. On the designated day, the group members present and discuss their topic in front of the entire class.

g. After the discussion, listeners have the opportunity to raise queries, offer comments, and provide feedback.

Possible Outcomes: Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would

a. improve problem-solving skills and critical-thinking abilities

b. enhance logical reasoning and analytical thinking

c. strengthen listening skills

d. enhance teamwork and time management abilities

e. increase self-awareness of communication strengths and weaknesses

f. bring clarity of thoughts, views, and opinions

g. generate fresh ideas and openness to input from others

h. lead to an in-depth understanding of the topic

i. enhance an ability to reach logical conclusions

j. develop an understanding of the research process

k. familiarise the learners with research conducted with reference to the text and/or writer under discussion

l. result in a deeper comprehension of diverse perspectives in literary texts **m.** develop personal views and opinions

Macrostrategy 3 : Minimise Perceptual Mismatches
Microstrategy 3 : TEAM (Together **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore**)**
Role of the Teacher: A Guide
Objective: Ensuring better teaching-learning experiences and active participation of students through rubrics-assisted learning and Digital Diary (an immediate and continuous feedback platform)

Suggested Course of Action: **Rubrics Assisted Learning**

a. Teacher prepares rubrics for activities (Group Discussion, Debate, Presentation, Speech) and shares them with students for self-assessment and peer-assessment.

b. Peer assessment can be for group or individual performance.

c. Teacher explains rubrics to learners and clarifies any queries.

d. Peers assess performance based on understanding and

perception. Fast learners may be given preference. Assessors justify assigned scores. Performers also justify their self-assessment. Both peer and self-assessors can defend scores if needed.

Digital Diary

a. Digital Diary, in the form of a Google form, can be utilised to assess the effectiveness of teachers and teaching activities. This tool allows students to provide immediate and regular feedback about their session experience at the end of each class. The feedback can be anonymous, but students have the option to reveal their identity if so desired. The Digital Diary includes sections for ratings, comments and feedback on various aspects. The teacher can then analyze the feedback received and make modifications to their teaching techniques based on the comments provided.

Possible Outcomes:

Rubrics Assisted Learning

Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would

a. provide clear and explicit expectations for students, outlining what they need to do to achieve specific learning goals

b. promote consistency and fairness in assessment. **c.** facilitate specific feedback to students.

Digital Diary

Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would

a. allow students to reflect on their learning experiences, express their thoughts, and document their personal growth

b. let students express their feelings, frustrations, expectations and joys related to their academic journey.

c. encourage self-awareness and introspection among students

d. provide insights into students' perceptions and expectations, helping teachers understand their perspective.

e. guide decision-making for implementing modifications to enhance teaching-learning practices.

f. boost teachers' confidence, serving as a source of motivation and encouragement.

Macrostrategy 4 : Promoting   Learner's Autonomy
Microstrategy 4 : Presentation: Express to Impress
Role of the Teacher   : A Facilitator
Objective :   Contextualising Linguistic and Literary Input by Integrating Language Skills and Fostering Literary Competence

Suggested Course of Action	a. Each student selects a writer or text from Indian Writing in English/Indian Literatures in English Translation.
	b. Students have the freedom to choose their preferred mode of presentation – Manuscript, Memorisation and Extemporaneous.
	c. The duration of the presentation varies based on the availability of time, student's ability and level, ranging from 1 to 15 minutes.
	d. A presentation framework may be provided as a guideline.
	e. The presenter formulates two objective-type questions related to the content discussed for the listeners to answer at the end of the presentation.
	f. Listeners record the questions for future reference/use.
	g. A question bank is created, consisting of two questions from each presenter.
	h. The course coordinator administers an online quiz using/ modifying questions from the presenters and classroom discussions on the prescribed texts in the syllabus.
Possible Outcomes :	Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would
	a. Enhance LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) skills
	b. Provide an opportunity to overcome nervousness and cultivate a positive mindset towards public speaking.
	c. Promote awareness of effective techniques to capture and maintain the listener's attention and deliver impactful conclusions.
	d. Develop an understanding of using non-verbal communication to enhance the impact of presentations.
	e. Increase awareness of qualitative ICT resources for collecting information and knowledge.
	f. Promote familiarity with synthesizing and creating original content.
	g. Emphasise the importance of acknowledging and properly citing utilised resources.
	h. Augment their knowledge about authors and texts

Macrostrategy 5 : Activating Intuitive Heuristics
Microstrategy 5 : Critical Analysis of a Literary Text
Role of theTeacher : A Guide
Objective: Promoting Learner Engagement with the text, Contextualising

	Linguistic Input by Integrating Language Skills and Fostering Literary Competence
Suggested Course of Action	a. Introduce the writer and the text to students.
	b. Discuss the plotline of the literary work.
	c. Screen a movie adaptation of the literary work, if available.
	d. Assess students' comprehension of the movie through a quiz or test covering aspects like setting, subject, theme, and characters.
	e. Provide an overview of the various literary aspects explored in the work.
	f. Discuss the meaning of relevant terms and theories related to the work.
	g. Conduct an in-depth analysis of the first chapter, focusing on the subject, theme, plot, characters, genre, setting, and narrative techniques.
	h. Offer guidelines to help students engage in critical analysis of the text. A model draft of a critical analysis of a certain portion can be provided for learners' reference.
	i. Divide the remaining content among students for study and analysis.
	j. Students analyze their assigned portion, following the provided guidelines, and prepare notes.
	k. During the detailed discussions of the text, as per the turn, students share their understanding of the assigned portion.
	l. Other students are encouraged to ask questions and raise queries.
	m. The teacher provides any missing details and fills in gaps as necessary.
Objectives Served:	Implementing the strategy in a planned and systematic manner would
	a. develop academic writing skills like summarising and paraphrasing
	b. augment higher-order thinking skills
	c. enhance competence in identifying relevant evidence and evaluating its appropriateness
	d. improve the skill of synthesising, evaluating the available content and creating one's own content
	e. lead to the understanding of the denotative and connotative meanings
	f. improve analytical abilities

Some potential challenges that teachers may encounter include:

a. Forming groups and selecting the most suitable combinations.
b. Addressing the focus on marks and exam-oriented mindset among students.
c. Managing attitudinal issues and challenges within the student group.
d. Assisting students in handling peer pressure effectively.
e. Efficiently managing time constraints during the activity.
f. Aligning with and fulfilling the students' objectives.
g. Determining objectives and outcomes of the activity considering the diverse group with varying levels of learning and learning objectives.

Such microstrategies are effective tools in engaging students in various literary and communicative activities. By exploring the themes, characters, and narrative techniques within the text with learning at the centre, students can enhance their analytical and interpretive skills, as well as develop their proficiency in the English language and literature. Through guided discussions, critical analysis, writing assignments, and creative projects centered around the text, students can deepen their understanding of literary elements, express their ideas effectively, and engage in meaningful literary discourse. This practical application of microstrategies using a specific text allows for a focused and comprehensive learning experience for the students of literary studies in English.

Moreover, teachers can develop her/his own microstrategies to design activities, as well as indigenous solutions to address the challenges they face, to achieve optimal outcomes from their efforts and time investment. It is crucial for students to experience learning and gain confidence, leading to a sense of satisfaction. The successful implementation of these strategies plays a significant role in fostering student engagement and achievement.

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