THE URGENCY OF INVESTIGATING NEW TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR TRAUMA STUDENTS: THE CASE OF ASHOKA UNIVERSITY

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Annotation. The impact of trauma on students' academic performance, particularly in language learning, is an increasingly important area of research. This study explores the urgency of adopting trauma-informed teaching techniques in English language classrooms at Ashoka University, India, with a specific focus on students affected by trauma. Using a mixed-methods approach, including pre- and post-course proficiency tests, classroom observations, and interviews, this research investigates the effectiveness of trauma-sensitive pedagogies such as mindfulness, narrative-based learning, and safe space protocols. Results indicate significant improvements in students' language proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, as well as enhanced emotional regulation and self-confidence. The study highlights the importance of integrating trauma-informed approaches into English language teaching, suggesting that such practices not only support trauma-affected students but can also enrich the learning environment for all students. The findings underscore the need for further research into trauma-sensitive teaching methods in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: trauma-informed pedagogy, English language teaching, trauma-affected students, Ashoka University, language proficiency, mindfulness in education, narrative-based learning, higher education, inclusive teaching methods, emotional regulation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing awareness of the impact that trauma can have on students' academic performance, particularly in language learning. Trauma—whether stemming from personal experiences, socio-political conflict, or migration—can severely affect cognitive and emotional functions, complicating the process of acquiring new languages, including English. As a global lingua franca, English is vital for academic and professional success, making its teaching especially significant for students affected by trauma.

This study examines the urgency of adapting English language teaching (ELT) methods to meet the unique needs of trauma-affected students at Ashoka University, a liberal arts institution in India known for its diverse student body, including those from conflict-ridden regions or marginalized communities. The case of Ashoka University presents a critical opportunity to explore how trauma-informed pedagogical strategies might enhance language acquisition and improve overall student outcomes in an English language learning context.

II. METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research to assess the efficacy of different teaching techniques for trauma-affected students. The sample consisted of 50 undergraduate students enrolled in English language courses at Ashoka University, selected based on self-reported experiences of trauma. These students participated in the study over the course of one semester.

The research utilized a combination of classroom observations, interviews, and pre- and post-course language proficiency tests. In addition to traditional grammar and vocabulary instruction, the teaching techniques incorporated trauma-sensitive methods, such as mindfulness exercises, safe space protocols, and narrative-based learning activities aimed at promoting emotional regulation and self-expression.

Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-course assessments of English language proficiency using a standardized test designed to measure listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with students, as well as feedback from instructors. The interviews focused on students' experiences with trauma, their perceptions of the teaching techniques used, and the impact of these techniques on their language learning.

III. RESULTS

The study analyzed data from 50 undergraduate students at Ashoka University who participated in a trauma-informed English language course. The results were based on a combination of pre- and post-course proficiency tests, classroom observations, and qualitative interviews. The detailed findings are as follows:

Quantitative Data: Pre- and Post-Course Language Proficiency

The pre- and post-course assessments measured students' proficiency in four key areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The assessments were conducted using a standardized language proficiency test designed to capture both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills.

Overall Proficiency Improvement: On average, students showed a 20% increase in their total language proficiency scores from pre-test to post-test. The average pre-test score was 55.4%, while the post-test average score was 75.4%, indicating a significant improvement in language skills.

Speaking Skills: Speaking skills showed the most significant improvement, with an average increase of 25%. The average score for speaking on the pre-test was 58.2%, which rose to 83.2% on the post-test. Students demonstrated improved fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence in speaking English.

Writing Skills: Writing scores also showed notable progress, with an average increase of 22%. The pre-test score for writing was 52.5%, while the post-test score increased to 74.5%. This improvement was attributed to the narrative-based writing assignments, which allowed students to connect emotionally with the content and express personal experiences in written form.

Listening Skills: Listening comprehension improved by 18%, with an increase from an average of 63% on the pre-test to 81% on the post-test. Students reported feeling more confident in understanding spoken English, particularly in discussions where mindfulness and active listening strategies were employed.

Reading Skills: Reading proficiency improved by 16%, with an average score of 60% on the pre-test rising to 76% on the post-test. This improvement was linked to the incorporation of trauma-sensitive texts that allowed students to engage with material that resonated with their personal experiences, fostering greater motivation to read.

Qualitative Data: Student and Instructor Feedback

Interviews with students and instructors revealed additional insights into the impact of trauma-informed teaching methods on learning outcomes:

Student Confidence and Engagement: Of the 50 students interviewed, 80% reported feeling more confident in their ability to use English in academic and personal settings by the end of the course. This was especially true for speaking and writing, where students felt less anxious about making mistakes. One student commented, "At the beginning, I was afraid to speak. But the storytelling exercises really helped me express myself. Now, I'm more comfortable in class discussions."

Improvement in Emotional Regulation: 75% of students noted a significant reduction in anxiety related to language learning. Many students attributed this change to the mindfulness exercises incorporated at the beginning of each class, which helped them feel grounded and focused. One participant noted, "The mindfulness activities before the lesson helped me clear my mind. It made me feel like I could approach the lesson calmly, without fear of judgment."

Instructor Observations: Instructors reported observing a 45% increase in overall student participation during the semester, particularly in group discussions and interactive activities. Several instructors noted a change in classroom dynamics, where initially withdrawn or disengaged students began contributing more frequently. One instructor stated, "The trauma-sensitive techniques really shifted the classroom environment. Students who were previously quiet and distant started sharing their thoughts more openly."

Narrative-based Learning: Instructors noted that narrative-based learning activities, in which students were asked to share personal stories or reflect on their own experiences in English, led to higher engagement and a stronger connection to the material. 70% of students mentioned in interviews that the inclusion of personal narratives made lessons feel more relevant to their lives, leading to a deeper emotional connection with the language.

Classroom Observations

Behavioral Engagement: Observations indicated a 50% increase in active participation (such as speaking during class, responding to questions, and engaging in group work) compared to the beginning of the semester. The supportive classroom environment, reinforced by trauma-informed practices, encouraged more interaction among students, even those who were initially reluctant to engage.

Peer Interactions: The use of collaborative learning techniques also fostered more positive peer interactions. 60% of students reported feeling more comfortable working with peers in group activities. This was attributed to the trauma-informed strategies that emphasized mutual respect and empathy, helping to build trust among students from diverse backgrounds.

Statistical Significance

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine if the changes in language proficiency were statistically significant. The results showed a significant difference in students' pre- and post-test scores across all four language areas ($p < 0.01$), confirming that the improvements in language proficiency were not due to chance but were a result of the trauma-informed pedagogical approach.

Summary of Results

The results suggest that trauma-informed English language teaching techniques significantly enhanced language proficiency in students affected by trauma. Key findings include:

- An average increase of 20% in overall language proficiency.
- The most substantial improvement in speaking skills (25% increase).
- Notable gains in writing (22% increase) and listening (18% increase) skills.
- A reduction in student anxiety, with 75% of students reporting improved emotional regulation.
- Enhanced classroom engagement, with 45% more student participation observed over the semester.

These findings indicate that trauma-informed methods, such as mindfulness practices, narrative-based activities, and creating a safe learning environment, can foster a more supportive and effective language learning experience for trauma-affected students.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the importance of developing and implementing trauma-sensitive teaching methods in English language classrooms. Trauma can affect various cognitive and emotional processes that are central to language acquisition, including memory, attention, and emotional regulation. Traditional teaching methods, which often prioritize rote learning and standardized testing, may not be effective for students who are dealing with the aftermath of trauma.

This research suggests that integrating trauma-informed approaches—such as mindfulness, narrative therapy, and creating safe, supportive classroom environments—can mitigate some of the barriers to language learning posed by trauma. By prioritizing emotional well-being alongside academic success, these methods can help students regain a sense of agency, build self-confidence, and reduce the psychological distress that can impede learning.

Moreover, the case of Ashoka University demonstrates that trauma-informed teaching is not just beneficial for students from conflict zones or marginalized backgrounds, but can enrich the learning environment for all students. The inclusive and supportive atmosphere fosters empathy and resilience, promoting a sense of community and mutual respect among students.

However, it is important to acknowledge that trauma affects individuals in unique ways, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective for all students. Further research is needed to refine and expand these techniques, particularly in diverse settings with varying cultural and socio-political contexts.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need to investigate and implement new teaching techniques that address the specific needs of trauma-affected students in English language learning contexts. The case of Ashoka University provides valuable insights into the positive outcomes of trauma-informed pedagogical practices and serves as a call to action for educators worldwide to prioritize student well-being alongside academic achievement. In doing so, educational institutions can better support vulnerable learners and create inclusive, empowering environments that promote language acquisition and personal growth.

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