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## Activity-Based Teaching: An Accessible Device for Communication in English

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### **Abstract:**

*English occupies a unique position in our country. The learning of English has become a growing necessity in the present-day scenario, all over the world, for the only reason that English is considered as the official link language in administration, society, business world, technology and most importantly in education, apart from holding the dignity of a library language. It can be expressed as a necessary-evil: necessary for its increasing importance when compared to native and other languages, and evil because it poses a constant threat of overpowering native languages. With the advantages surging an upward graphical curve, it cannot be denied that seeking to teaching and learning of English for language acquisition is now a matter of primary concern to teachers as well as learners, especially for communication. At the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels, whatever be the medium of instruction, English is learned as a secondary language wherein vocabulary, structural and functional aspects are graded higher than communication. At the college level, the need for communication becomes a requisite as English turns to be the only means of instruction. Undergraduates, especially students from rural backgrounds and native medium, are desperately on the lookout for feasible devices to learn and communicate in English. This paper proposes to highlight the significance of activity-based teaching implemented for students at the undergraduate level, who lack the courage and confidence to communicate in English and hence remain low in the ranking scale.*

**Key words:** Motivation, Acquaintance, Participation, Innovation

### **1.General Objective**

The aim of this research work is to adopt simple activities to help participants enhance their aural-oral skills through active interaction. Learners are assisted to respond confidently and spontaneously, to overcome fear of using the language and to engage themselves in learning the skills. It also attempts at imparting language acquisition skills by encouraging participation and involvement.

### **2.Specific Objective**

- To use simple activities to promote aural-oral skills for comfortable communication.
- To study the feasibility of Activity-Based Teaching for this purpose.
- To apply the methods of Activity-Based Teaching at the Undergraduate level.
- To help students speak accurately rather than fluently.

### **3.Communicative Approach**

“Communication is the sharing of ideas and feeling in a mood of mutuality.” --- Edgar Dale

Activity-based approach can be understood to be a method that is implemented using informal teaching patterns which is more learner-centred than the regular teacher-centred one. It is comprised of simple, interesting, uncomplicated activities that drive the learners out of their shell and motivate them to involve themselves in order to learn to communicate. The fact that the students had all along been exposed to the intricacies of the language and had only been concentrating on grades and marks rather than developing speaking abilities, cannot be denied. In a group of mixed-performers, students find it extremely difficult to cope with the syllabus wherein communication poses as an unachievable hurdle. It is found that activities directed towards improving speaking competencies help them a great deal in building confidence, developing skill and performing better in the regular course as well. Students are faced with challenges and opportunities to develop their skills through activities and mould themselves to suit the classroom atmosphere. The underlying rationale on ‘Communicative Competence’ as Sharma puts it:

The emphasis is on learning by ‘use’. Chinese instructions followed the same strategy who forced the students to open their mouth and speak. Law of use is a very significant principle of learning and this approach fully exploits it. For them ‘use’ rightly means ‘communication’. It lays emphasis on the social aspect of the language. (2008: 100)

Motivation plays an extremely important role in the learning process. Students harbour a sense of fear and uncertainty when they realize their incapability in communicating effectively, and eventually, this reflects on their overall performance. It becomes essential to identify such students and encourage them to attend this training programme designed for their benefit. As Vyas quotes in the words of Normandia, "Poor motivation and lack of information related to the importance of mastering language skills have prevented students from learning them effectively" (2009:249). Acquaintance to the process of learning and acquisition, leads the participants into understanding the method adopted for learning and its accessibility. It should be specified that the learning process would impart both fun and meaningful. As the learners begin to sense the outcome of the approach, participation gradually increases. Activities are organized in a well-planned manner so as to retain the interest of the participants, besides encouraging them into active oral interaction. With the implementation of activities ranging from simple to considerably complicated levels, depending on the performers, participants would be working on a wide variety of exercises emphasizing on listening and speaking skills. The final sessions would be restricted to innovative activities organized and conducted by the learners themselves, which would act as a kind of feedback to the sessions undertaken by them. In the words of Sharma, "Oral work is the basis of good learning of the language. In fact, it strengthens the foundation of language learning. If a teacher develops the oral habit in students, reading and writing practice will come automatically and easily to the students"(2008: 108).

#### 4.Methodology

"At the level of language theory, Communicative Language Teaching has a rich, if somewhat electric, theoretical base. Some of the characteristics of this communicative view of language follow:

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
- The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
- The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning ...." (Richards2001:161)

#### 5.Course Work

Around 90 sessions are spread over a period of two semesters, with students taking up assessment programs at the end of each semester. Training sessions are conducted separately after regular classes. Students either respond individually or in groups, depending on the activity implemented. It is made clear that achieving objectives solely lie in the hands of the participants, their involvement and the urge to learn. Assistance is offered only when necessary, while the trainer plays the role of an observer and a spectator.

#### 6.Syllabus Design

Penny McKay suggests that apart from focusing on development and individual learners' activities should appeal to a learner's sense of fun. Such activities, he acclaims, are enjoyable and achievable and motivate learners because they enable them to be successful according to their individual abilities. Activities are grouped on the basis of the skills they intend to enhance. Emphasis on listening and speaking skills paves way into acquiring reading and writing abilities. The first few sessions use as icebreakers to instill familiarity among participants. Activities related to listening skills and speaking skills are alternated and implemented during the sessions. Around a hundred activities under each skill are exercised, coupled with reading and writing practice. At the end of each level, a feedback from the students is encouraged. The session moves on to the next level of activities.

#### 7.Sample Activities

Preparation Phase:-The course begins with ice-breaking sessions to promote socialization among peers.

Listening activities include topics based on:-

- Listening Comprehension
- Listening and Typing
- Listening and Sequencing
- Filling in missing ideas
- Listening for details
- Following directions
- Current issues- analysing and evaluating.

Speaking activities promoting fluency include:-

- Describing Appearances
- Narrating and debating
- Translation Technique
- Speeches and Riddle Making
- Conversations
- Role plays Activities.

According to Richards (2001: 161) "The emphasis in Communicative Language Teaching on the process of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found in more traditional second language classrooms ..... Often there is no text, grammar rules are not presented, classroom arrangement is nonstandard, students are expected to interact primarily with each other rather than with the teacher, and correction of errors may be absent or infrequent ..... CLT methodologists consequently recommend that learners learn to see that failed communication is a joint responsibility and not the fault of speaker or listener. Similarly, successful communication is an accomplishment jointly achieved and acknowledged."

## **8.Data Collection**

### *8.1 Details of Participants*

Participants from the Undergraduate level who either hail from a native medium background or have had limited exposure to English till the higher secondary level, and who lack confidence or experience in communicating comfortably, form the target group for this project. The present research study is related to undergraduate girls of Auxilium College, Vellore. It mainly focuses on girls who are willing to avail the assistance regardless of their course of study.

### *8.2 Role of Participants*

Participant's involvement in completing the activities is intently observed and cooperating with peers is motivated. Group activities rather than individualistic performances are preferred. Error correction through peers serves a better purpose. Students' feedback on the sessions is also valued after completing the syllabus.

## **9.Data Interpretation, Analysis and Results**

Knowing how well or how badly they are performing is equally important for learners. For those doing well, knowledge of success serves as a unique motivator; it pushes them on to even greater effort. But even for the not-so-successful learners, it serves a useful purpose. By making them aware of their areas of need, it enables them to focus their attention and efforts.

(Tickoo2010:299)

The analysis of this research work is purely based on observation of students' response, participation and involvement; and the recorded documents of the pre-test, midterm and post-test results collected during the course of the training. Their performance level is a comparative one wherein the recorded document stands as proof to their acquisition of skills. Language in written form support their listening and understanding capacity, and their choice of vocabulary testifies speaking skills. Students themselves assess their ability in acquiring aural-oral skills after the training programme. However, recorded speeches that are documented, would be used to identify the frequency of errors at the three stages of the tests, to mark the effectiveness of this research programme. The assessment program that is conducted at the end of each semester is framed to analyse the performance of the participants, and also to observe aspects like confidence and level of acquisition. Data includes a documentation of the grades obtained in the pre-test and post-test assessment. A comparative study gives the results of the findings. Interpretation is based on the experimentation conducted and the students' improvement in their regular classes.

## **10.Limitations**

- Motivating students to enrol and attend classes regularly needs constant monitoring.
- It's undoubtedly a time consuming process but is sure to elicit better results.
- Large groups are difficult to maintain, hence only a limited number are allowed to register each time.
- It calls for a lot of patience and preparation for the trainer to emerge successful in tuning the students to respond favourably.

## **11.Findings**

It is found that the role of the trainer provides a suitable ambiance for the participants and simultaneously builds in confidence through constant encouragement into active interaction. The methods followed and the activities adapted to enhance aural-oral skills seem to produce good results only if the students understand the real purpose underlying each activity. Collaborative work shows the eager response and better motivation in participating. Activities planned according to students' preference lead to greater interest and better learning. Error correction by peers also rules out fear and hesitation. Learning seems easier with a mixed ability group. Students seem to cooperate better with this informal way of learning. Activities in the form of games are looked forward to in every session.

## **12.Conclusion**

The success of the whole program lies in creating an awareness among the learners about the need for communication and its impact on their performance in the regular stream. With active participation it can be strongly concluded that Activity-Based Teaching does create an interest and enhances communicative abilities in students apart from standing testimony to the results achieved in their undergraduate course. Though it poses its own limitations such as regularity in attendance and initiating responses, especially in group activities, it cannot be denied that students do benefit adequately in acquiring good vocabulary and also overcome fear and lack of confidence through this informal method of learning.

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