



Lights, Camera, Action: Activities In ESL Classroom In Pursuance Of Language Learning

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Abstract

The changing scenario of education makes it explicit that the classroom is not just a place for learners to learn; it is equally a place for teachers to develop feeling for learning. Nonetheless, educators and ELT practitioners always decry the teacher dominated classrooms- where the teacher dominates the whole show inside out. He/she occupies the centre; he/she is the Mr. /Ms. Know All, who fills the 'Empty Buckets' of learners with knowledge considered as 'ambrosia'. In today's interactive classroom teaching, there is no place for such a scene. Now, teaching is a facilitating learning activity; creating opportunities for learning to take place. So the teacher is a facilitator. New experiments and methods are being tried out to create the best learning environment in the classroom. Activities promoting learner participation are being thought more effective and learner centred. Activities ensure gradual participation and contribution of every individual in the classroom. This again helps the learners to work as a contributory force in the process of learning. The present paper explores the role and significance of activities in ELT classroom with specific reference to English language teaching to tribal students. It also discusses relevance of activities in making language learning process entertaining.

Key words: Activity, ESL, Language Learning, Learner centred.

Introduction

Planning learning experiences and determining effective learning – teaching strategies in teaching settings are important for the quality of teaching. In the learning teaching process,





teaching conditions should be organized to reach pre-determined targets. In this process, content, method-technique and tools-equipment are determined. Teaching method can be defined as the ways to be followed to guide the students towards the objectives set. According to Burden and Byrd (1994), *'Instructional strategies are the means by which the content is presented and the learning objectives are achieved. On the other hand, the teaching technique is a way of implementing a teaching method or a route to be followed in presenting the teaching materials and structuring teaching activities'*. In colleges where teacher student are educated, the teaching knowledge and skills obtained by student teachers and the teaching approaches adopted by them would affect students in classrooms where they would be teaching. Effective teachers have a repertoire of strategies that can be used in the classroom.

ELT- Present Scenario

English language teaching at present is more or less restricted to reading the prescribed lessons i.e. poems, short stories, prose lessons, etc. and explain the same. Comprehension of a lesson in a story form is all that the teacher and student aim at. It is so because the nature of questions in examination forces the teacher and student both to do so; to memorize and produce in descriptive form in the answer sheet. Following are a few elements. These elements characterize the teaching and learning process and the outcome.

Curriculum & Syllabus

In learning English as a foreign language, the very first stage of an educational program comes under scanner is curriculum. Curriculum formally sets aims and objectives of learning process. It determines what and how aspects of learning. English language teaching at university level is severely affected by the nature of curriculum. The nature of aims and objectives is not always clear. They even are unrealistic at certain points. Needs are often generalized and students of diverse intellectual abilities are assumed to be similar. Often, syllabus consists of prose lessons, poems, and short stories.





Classroom Instruction

Classroom instruction involves completing prescribed syllabus. Teachers more often restrict classroom teaching to reading lessons, explaining them, and solving questions/tasks given below each lesson. Students generally listen to the teacher. They most of the time remain passive. A few of them ask questions not necessarily always about learning language effectively. Students concentrate on those areas of syllabus they may have questions in examination. Effective classroom instruction and improved student outcomes begin with the teacher who thinks beyond the prescription and attempts to maximize student participation. Maximizing student participation in learning process more often culminates into satisfaction in learning a language. Although, teachers are provided with many opportunities concerning technology in learning-teaching process, teachers usually do not utilize these opportunities.

Evaluation

Evaluation system is also under the scanner while thinking of failure in learning English. Outmoded evaluation system have been in use which tests memory rather than language competence and makes it possible for students to 'pass' in English with the help of cribs, without having learnt the language. Usually, the four language skills are included in aims and objectives, i.e. students are expected to be able to listen, speak, read, and write acceptable English. But no deliberate provision is seen being made in syllabus to ensure this. Evaluation is being done on the basis of what a student can remember and write in an answer paper as a response to stereotyped questions.

ELT Instruction through Activities

In the past, English language teachers' primary work assigned to them was limited to instruction. This instruction was more specifically limited to completing the prescribed syllabus. Further, completion of syllabus was thought as a pledge to be exercised in any manner possible. Failing to discharge this exercise was also thought as an educational sin. More recently, however, the teaching community is increasingly involved in the creation and implementation of innovations within classroom teaching. Activities provide opportunities for learners to use the language with one another and with people in the community. Prabhu rightly points out that '*An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given*





information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task' (Prabhu, 1987). Utility of common situations is unquestionable, as it generates enthusiasm, gives confidence and initiates individual thinking. Activities aiming at language teaching do touch upon diverse needs and interests of students.

Nonetheless, designing activities is not always a cakewalk. It has to face many difficulties. These may start from the stage of designing to execution. An effective activity in one classroom always does not have the same result in other classroom. Among all, syllabus completion and managing such activities in regular classroom teaching do pose a challenge before the teacher. The issue is being thought over by researchers and ELT experts in great details. However, different classroom settings demand different way outs to tackle difficulties. The teacher has to scratch his/her head to find appropriate way out in consideration with his/her classroom setting. There is no way a person suggesting way outs to all teachers in all situations.

Classroom Activities

Activity-based strategies encourage students to learn by doing. They provide authentic, real-life opportunities for students to participate in active, self-directed learning experiences where they have opportunities to explore, make choices, solve problems, and interact with others. Activity-based learning is often referred to as project-based learning and shares many of the goals of independent and cooperative learning. Students progress through activities at their own pace, interest, and developmental level. At the same time, students take responsibility for their learning and gain lifelong skills of collaboration and negotiation.

Although active learning experiences are student-centred and promote choice and independence, the teacher must set up routines and expectations for learning and monitor the results through appropriate recording devices – for example, checklists or journal entries. Teachers invite willing participation in activity-based strategies by ensuring that content and activities are relevant and stimulating for students. Activities in the classroom can be of various types. They feature from individual to group. Among these activities there may have



variation as per need and adaptability. Activities ensure active participation of majority of students. Generally, classroom activities are task based activities, role play activities, mental imagery activities, etc. Activities executed in a classroom setting may not have the same nature.

Individual Activity

Individual activity is more suitable to the class having small number of students. But it does not necessarily limit to a class having small number of students. However, planning individual activity in large class requires a great effort at the execution level. Sometimes planning individual activity in large class may culminate into unsatisfactory results. It also consumes a lot of time. In individual activity the teacher can present a picture and ask one student to describe what is there in the picture. The teacher can ask a student to express his/her likes and dislikes. Any type of activity needs scaffolding. The teacher's job is to do the same.

Pair Activity

Pair activity is more suitable to the class where the teacher feels that individual activity may not be suitable. Such activities lessen some burden that individual activities sometimes create. Here students have interaction with each other. These activities are suitable for teaching communication. Pair activities can boost healthy competition in the classroom. The teacher has to have the ability to mold such competitive spirit of students. He/she also have to ensure the proper direction to direct the competitive spirit to culminate into language use/learning.

Group Activity

Group activities are thought most suitable to large classes. In Indian classrooms student strength is far away from ideal. Nonetheless, many teachers grudge over the issue of large classes. They accuse large classes of hampering the learning process. Alongside, they feel helpless with the thought that it is very difficult to ensure that each student learns/uses language. A group activity is one of the mostly advised classroom techniques to solve the problem of large classes.

Activity-1

Activity: Who are you?

Aim: To introduce others

To complete the information sheet by asking and answering questions



Grammar & Functions:

Introducing others

Present simple questions with question words:

What, where, how old

Present simple questions without a question word

Vocabulary –

Personal information: jobs, age, towns

(Information Sheet)

Name	Age	Job	Where/live	Brothers & Sisters

Material: Photocopies of the information sheet

Procedure:

- Divide students into pairs & give one of them an information sheet.
- Ask him/her to fill up the sheet by asking questions to his/her partner with *What, where, how old, etc.*
- Give them 10 minutes to fill up the sheet.
- Collect all the completed sheets randomly & mix them.
- Then ask for volunteers to choose one sheet and announce the name of the student the sheet gives information about.
- Ask the first student to introduce the other student to the class with the help of the sheet.
- Provide any help that needs to scaffold the student's performance.



Time: 30 to 40 minutes

Tips for Maximizing the Effectiveness of Activities

- Keep teacher talk to a minimum.
- Explain as much as possible by demonstrating the process, explaining in different ways, and repeating.
- Don't worry if every learner doesn't understand every part of an activity.
- Move on when the majority of the learners get the idea, and then circulate and help as needed—unobtrusively.
- Repeat the activity to maximize student participation.
- Have fun.

One way to gauge the success of a class for English language learners is to observe how much or how little the students need scaffolding in the class. The more learners are working independently, in pairs, or in small groups, the more successful the class. Activities are designed to be lively, interactive, and fun. When people are comfortable they are likely to learn more. An active, cooperative class is a class where a great deal of learning—social, cultural, and linguistic—is evident.

Conclusion

Language teaching aims to equip learners to use language in meaningful situations. The teacher can predict everyday situations students find themselves in. He/she has to adapt such situations and devise activities of any sort. He/she make it a point that activities need to be interesting. Analysis of students' interests can help the teacher to devise classroom activities. Thus, activities can become a major classroom technique to teach language successfully.

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