

ENHANCING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH ACTIVITY-BASED LEARNING: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY BASED ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN INDIA

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Abstract

One of the innovative and effective approaches to engaging young learners actively in the learning process is Activity-based language learning. It focuses on creating an interactive learning environment to make interest in learning a language. This paper aims to determine the efficacy of activity-based language learning in promoting English language proficiency among young learners. Activity-based learning is a typical example of non-traditional methodologies opposed to the traditional lecture-based system. This research study aims to reveal how ABL can contribute to certain specific English Language Skills such as vocabulary improvement, better grammatical orientation, enhanced speaking & listening skills, improved reading comprehension, and wellstructured writing skills. The study employed a mixed method that combines the quantitative and qualitative data which enabled us to understand the nuances of ABL-influenced language proficiency. The study includes the analysis of language skills amongst various groups of students who have different age groups and proficiency levels from higher study institutions. To accomplish this, students were facilitated over the course of a semester using role-plays, group activities, and games such as discussions for language stimulation and other project-based assignments. The purpose of this was to investigate the potential effectiveness of activity-based learning in developing learners' English language proficiency. Activity-based learning, which is

characterized by interactive and hands-on activities; stands as a counterpoint to the more traditional lecture-leading methodology. This paper examines the extent to which technological tools could be useful in enhancing different language competencies namely vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills can improve amongst learners of English as a foreign language. This paper is a comprehensive analysis done by a mixed-method study, including both quantitative and qualitative data analysis processes to evaluate the effect of activity-based learning on language proficiency.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Foreign Language Learning, Activity-Based Learning, vocabulary building, LSRW skills.

Introduction

Most of the colleges in India have adopted English as the medium of instruction intending to enhance the language proficiency of the learners. This helps the students to be equipped with useful learning processes and approaches to improve the use of the English language for academic purposes. The new education system in our country has adopted a learner-centered approach focusing on various kinds of classroom activities to improve language skills. The education system should augment the communicative competence of the students to prepare them globally competent. Hence, it is inevitable for many universities to reframe their curriculum by implementing the new strategy of activity-based language learning.

Learning the grammar rules and sentence structure is important to use the language accurately whereas the most vital steps to be taken for allowing them to use the English language in their day-to-day life. Practical usage of the language in real-life situations will enhance their vocabulary power and fluency as well. The common problems of non-native speakers of English such as mother tongue influence and fragile vocabulary can be avoided by giving them the opportunity to participate in the activities either individually or in a group. The students from rural areas of the country have less opportunity to mingle with native speakers and to use English in their daily lives. To address this issue, the language teachers of Indian universities need to employ an innovative teaching approach to their undergraduate students focusing on creative real-life situations for communicating in English rather than solely framing traditional theoretical rules of learning language. The learners should be encouraged to actively participate in communicative practices every day rather than giving them training with the traditional grammar rules.

Activity-based language learning (ABL) is the best teaching strategy of the present education system that can match the needs of English language teaching and learning. It is a unique method that differs from the traditional teaching method as this method makes the learners involved in integrated learning activities in real life, and hence it is known as a learner-centered approach to the teaching-learning process. In other words, this method of teaching encourages the learners to participate in the communication process more than be concerned about grammar rules. In this way, they can convey the ideas through messages formally and informally. There are certain

key points discussed by several researchers about Activity-based and Project-based language learning.

- It focuses on accurate language content and usage rather than on grammatical rules and structures.
- It creates a team attitude among the learners and develops interpersonal skills.
- The activities are framed based on real-life situations.
- Teacher is not the instructor rather they become facilitators.
- Encourages the learners to participate in several stage activities such as oral talks, short speeches like just a minute, debates, presentations, and so on.

According to earlier research,

"In the activity-based teaching and learning process, the learners are involved in productoriented skills ... have the opportunities to use skills like problem-solving, creative thinking, decision making ... building confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy in developing cognitive abilities" (Solomon et. al 2003).

The research that was done by Chayanuvat (2007) examined the possibilities of implementing an activity-based learning system for a basic English course to develop the LSRW skills of non-native adult students. Her questionnaires and interviews proved that more than 70% of the students were not comfortable with the activities due to their lack of language fluency. Srikrai (2008) conducted research among native English teachers on the same topic and her research reveals that the students were motivated and gained more confluence through the activities. The study shows that non-native learners can also get motivated and gain confidence in using English, especially in speaking when they are involved in several learning activities. The earlier studies on this topic show a few pieces of evidence to reveal the effectiveness of activity-based learning among undergraduate students especially professional students who want to improve their language competency. The present paper aims to collect innovative strategic ideas from adult learners and language teachers regarding the implementation of activity-based language learning for undergraduate students.

Methodology

A thorough study was done among a group of undergraduate engineering students, both male and female students. The learners were engineering students from two different reputed universities in India. The learner group contained young adults of average age 18 to 20. They had taken the Communicative English course as part of their curriculum. The Communicative English course for undergraduate engineering students is a 45-hour, 4-credit English course designed as per the university requirements. The major objective of this course is to develop technical students' English language proficiency. The course contains various activities that enhance the four skills of the English language (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing). Grading of the course depends on the written test and also the activity marks that had been awarded during the practical sessions. The methodology of the study includes a structured interview that was conducted among the learners in order to collect suggestions and feedback about the activities inside the classroom. The

open-ended questions allowed the learners to come out with their experiences and suggestions for improvement. This helped the study gather more information besides the given questions and reframe the activities according to the comfort level of the learners. The response of the participants in this data collection was found very sincere and ethical.

Implementation of Activity-Based Teaching-learning Approach in a Language Class

As per the new curriculum of various technical universities in India, a new technique of activity-based teaching and learning was implemented. The prime purpose of this method of teaching is to encourage the learners to communicate in the English language without any hesitation.

Sl.	Areas of Instruction	Sample	Feedback and Suggestions collected from
No		Group	different groups
1	Language and Content	Group1	We applied the learned vocabulary in our daily
			lives. We applied our technical knowledge in
			preparing answers.
		Group2	The activities made us improve our interpersonal
			skills because most of the activities were done as a
			team. We applied AI tools for writing the content.
2	Preparation of activities	Group1	Preparation time helps us participate in the
			activities productively.
		Group2	The level of presentation is moderate and hence
			preparation time should be increased
3	Preparation of language	Group1	Language level should be balanced with the
			previous knowledge of the learners
		Group2	Lessons and activities should be given in advance
			to practice and perform
4	Participation in activities	Group1	We enjoyed participating in activities. Sometimes
			we couldn't perform well because of the lack of
			coordination, so need clearer instructions
		Group2	The activities are very interesting. The number of
			activities is more but the preparation time is less.
			We need more time to practice.

Table 1: Example of the feedback collected from interview groups

Based on the data collected through the interviews, the study has reached a conclusion that the language proficiency of undergraduate students was enhanced by using activity-based teaching strategies. The well-designed activities helped them to improve their four language skills (LSRW), especially listening and speaking. Though the learners used Artificial Intelligence tools to create their content, they all agreed that their writing skills were sharpened when they participated in activities such as writing technical and non-technical paragraphs for discussion. They all had one

common opinion that the traditional way of teaching made them learn the rules whereas the new activity-based approach made them think critically and discuss things empathetically using accurate language.

Discussion and Findings

The current study on Activity-Based Language Learning paved the way to understand various approaches for improving English language fluency among adult students in higher education institutions. The most significant finding of this research study was that the use of an activity-based learning approach and its implementation leads to a balanced mode of learning language and accomplishing the given tasks. The study was carried out on a group of adult learners and the approaches used in various higher education institutions to learn English as a foreign language were empirically studied by a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative methods. The results show that verbal and non-verbal communicative activities help to develop the language proficiency of students even at the basic level. Hence, the activity-based language learning approach requires special efforts to design and organize certain activities, interlinking those activities with the theoretical part of the subject, and executing with proper communication. The process of developing skills involves various steps such as designing, planning, organizing, performing, regulating, and evaluating. However, the major provision of the activity-based learning approach is to analyze the initial potential of the learners and set goals for incessant improvement to develop better professional traits. The results of the study were confined to the effectiveness of the approach in the perspectives of learning English as a foreign language. The study also emphasized the importance of implementing innovative teaching methods that can contribute a remarkable way to acquiring proficiency in a foreign language such as English. It confirms the effectiveness of several activities for learning English that include improving vocabulary power, grammar, pronunciation, and communication.

Conclusion

The current study on Activity-based learning has explored various strategies to learn English as a foreign language. The study collected the opinions and feedback from learners of the age group 18 to 20. The methodology was in the form of a questionnaire that explored the ideas of the learners about how activity-based teaching can be used in the language classroom to apply their knowledge in the form of performances. The study also explored the students' opinions about how the innovative teaching-learning method enhanced their language skills. The answers to the questionnaire have been analyzed based on the learners' levels and the results revealed a few issues regarding implementing this learning approach. Most of the learners opined that the approach is effective and can be implemented because they can interestingly learn the language and use it in their real-time situations without any disinclination. They also opined that the implementation of activity-based language learning may have some limitations such as shortage of time. In the opinion of many learners, the preparation time is insufficient and hence the study suggests that better planning and systematic organizing can make the teaching approach more effective.

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