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Activity-based English language learning: A contemporary learner-friendly approach for developing speaking skills in the over-crowded classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Developing speaking skills in English language is a strenuous work for a non-native speaker of English. Even a trained facilitator also goes through troublesome situations as in most of the cases, Indian classrooms are crowded. Minute attention and remedial classes seem uncertain due to the lack of time, space and scope. Limitations of learning teaching materials are also important issue in Indian learning-teaching environment. In this circumstance, this work is a sort of action research or remedial work in search of effective activities which can be constructively solicited for the benefit of the target learners' group. Listening is a necessary part in the learning process of speaking skills. But in a developing country like India, it's tough to arrange contemporary audio-visual gadgets always. So the language related activities are designed in such a way that by using least amount of learning teaching materials, an instructor will be able to guide the learners. The set-backs of all the nineteen methods, approaches and techniques are already known worldwide. Without stressing on a particular method or instead of developing a new method, this work is a sincere attempt to incorporate relevant activities to enhance the speaking skills of the learners. The salient idiosyncrasy is to accomplish a standard joyful learning session which should be continuous, comprehensive and focused simultaneously.

Keywords— Activity, Method, Approach, Organized, Regular, Proficiency, Facilitator, Learner-Friendliness, Expertise, Standards, Supportive, Speaking, Writing, Listening, Topic, Memory, Upskill, Orators, Booster, Classify, Technology

1. INTRODUCTION

The word activity can be described as the particular state or condition on which contrivances are happening or being accomplished. In a learning teaching process, activities are important to understand the subject in a better way and they are also effective to get a demonstration of practical world inside the four walls of class rooms. If the activity is interesting it can attract even the most disobedient learner of the class room also and make the learning-teaching process interesting. In all the nineteen methods of learning English language, namely, direct method, structural approach, grammar-translation method, oral approach, audio-lingual method, total physical response, silent method, communicative language teaching, natural approach, task-based language teaching, community language learning, suggestopedia, cognitive approach, humanistic approach, functional-notional approach, series method, language immersion, dogma language teaching and ecclesiastical method, activities are incorporated to amplify the learner-friendliness of the session.

2. IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

Learning is the attainment of enlightenment or expertise through traditional study, inquiry, endurance or simply the anticipated process for traditional teaching process and contemporary learning proceedings. Teaching, on the other hand, is the process to promulgate knowledge or instruct a learner or a group of learners to groom themselves in a particular field of expertise or any subject in general. Beside this, language is the medium of human dissemination, either spoken or written, comprising of the use of a word or a group of words in an organized and regular way. In an English class, the learning design depends on the acquisition of the target language, number of learners in the class room, availability of learning-teaching materials, standards of the learners and above all the proficiency of the facilitator.

The fourth-coming language activities, games and applications are designed in such a way that they can be incorporated in over-crowded class rooms with minimum use of learning-teaching materials and least supportive peripherals. Among listening, speaking, reading and writing, the focus point of this work is speaking as practicing speaking skills is difficult in the over-crowded

class rooms of India. The typical approach of language learning that starts with words, immediately a learner learns the alphabets is also followed here in the order to their appearance.

Table 1: Activity-I: Word building game

Choice of the activity and justification:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To improve collaborative work among the learners. ❖ To enhance promptness in thinking and expression. ❖ To ameliorate word stock (vocabulary building). ❖ To revamp pronunciation through effective listening skill. ❖ To understand correct spelling. ❖ To be familiar with the meaning of unknown words.
Brief introduction:	Learning a language starts with its letters. Next comewords. Proper sound, articulation and pronunciation are important but in a developing country like India, lack of proper infrastructure may hinder the learning-teaching process. So this activity is chosen to incorporate in minimum infrastructure.
Pre learning-teaching process:	Asking the learners to listen to English words, sentences as a meaningful combination of words through traditional and digital medium (if possible) and read English books, newspaper, brochure, study materials (whatever is available) etc.
While learning-teaching process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may take approximately 5-6 minutes for the facilitator to explain the fourth-coming activity. ▪ Over all duration depends on the strength of the classroom. Approximately, it takes only 30 seconds for a single learner. Consequently, for a classroom of sixty (60) students it may take (60*30 seconds) = 180 seconds (or) 3 minutes for a single round. As per the available time and interest of the learners, the facilitator may repeat the rounds for four to five times.
Classroom arrangement:	Learning-teaching Materials: This activity can be practiced as an in-house or out-house activity. Writing board and chalks (or) markers are the common minimum requirements.
Learning-teaching methodology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitator's Role: At the very beginning, the facilitator will explain the activity clearly. ➤ Explanation: The facilitator should write several letters on the writing board. Next she/he will instruct any learner (if possible, from the first learner or a learner from the back bench) to form (or) tell another word by using the letter(s), written on the writing board. <p>Example: If the facilitator writes the letters like 'a', 'f', 't', 's', 'l', 'o', 'k', 'o'.</p> <p>The first participant may form 'fast'. Then next learner may form 'look'. Another participant may form 'lost'. The fourth student may say 'loot'. The fifth learner may form 'last'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In this way this activity will move forward. ➤ Each time the facilitator will write the pronounced word on the writing board and re-pronounce the word, along with its meaning as the learners may understand the correct spelling and pronunciation. ➤ It is better to instruct the learners to note down the uttered words during this activity for future proceedings. ➤ If it is not possible to construct any new word, the facilitator may give a new set of letters.
Post learning-teaching process:	If total sixty (60) learners are there in the classroom, at the end of a single round of the activity, one learner will be able to learn the spelling, pronunciation and meaning of total sixty one (61) words (first one by the facilitator and sixty by the learners).
Evaluation (formative assessment):	The facilitator may utilize rubrics for continuous and comprehensive evaluation of the learners' performance on the basis of their active involvement, participation and prompt reply with correct pronunciation.
Outcome (feedback of the students):	After completing the activity learners' feedback should be taken with the help of the model questionnaire, mentioned below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you like to participate in the activity? • Is the activity effective? Yes/No. • Do you want to participate in the activity again? • Do you think this activity is helpful to develop your pronunciation and vocabulary?
Further proceedings and chance of improvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The above-mentioned activity can be introduced more effectively with the help of digital speech corrector. ✓ For spelling also digital dictionary may be used, if possible. ✓ Contemporary digital audio-visual learning-teaching materials will make the session more interesting and effective.

Table 2: Activity-II: Sentence junction game

Choice of the activity and justification:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To develop collaborative sentence formation skills among the learners. ❖ To improve word arrangement or re-arrangement, in order to form a meaningful sentence. ❖ To ameliorate vocabulary and uses. ❖ To revamp sentence pronunciation with the proper use of intonation, falling tone, rising tone etc. ❖ To understand accurate spelling. ❖ To be familiar with the meanings of the sentence.
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Brief introduction:	After learning different words, next comes the formation of correct sentences. Instead of using the traditional way to understand <i>Subject+verb+object</i> (or) <i>Subject+verb</i> (or) <i>Subject+verb+subject complement</i> (or) <i>Subject+verb+direct object+ object complement</i> first, then to write assertive sentences, this activity is an attempt to follow the reverse model i.e. to arrange or re-arrange the words meaningfully and then only to discuss the structural part of a complete sentence.
Pre learning-teaching process:	Asking the learners to listen to English sentences through traditional and contemporary medium (if possible).
While learning-teaching process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may take approximately 5-6 minutes for the facilitator to explain the fourth-coming activity. ▪ Over all consumption of time depends on the strength of the classroom. Approximately, it takes only one (1) minute for a single learner. Consequently, for a classroom of sixty (60) students it may take (60*1 minute) = 60 minutes (or) 1 hour for a single round. As per the available time and interest of the learners, the facilitator may repeat the rounds.
Classroom arrangement:	Learning-teaching Materials: Writing board and chinks (or) markers are the common minimum requirement.
Learning-teaching methodology:	<p>➤ Facilitator's Role: At the very beginning, the facilitator will explain the fourth-coming activity clearly.</p> <p>➤ Explanation: The facilitator should tell a simple sentence loudly with proper intonation. Then she/he will write the same sentence on the board. Next she/he will instruct any learner (if possible, from the first learner or a learner from the back bench, this activity may start) to form (or) tell another sentence by using the last word of the previous sentence which is told by the facilitator.</p> <p>Example: If the facilitator says and writes, "He is twelve years old." </p> <p>The first participant will form another sentence by using the last word "old" or "Old". She/he may say, "The old gentleman phoned them." </p> <p><u>After writing the sentence on the board, the facilitator will mark the subject ("The old"), verb ("phoned") and object ("them") and explain their significance.</u></p> <p>Now the last word is "them" or "Them". So, the next participant will form another sentence by using "them" or "Them".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In this way this activity will move forward. ➤ Each time the facilitator will write the sentence on the writing board and re-pronounce the sentence with proper intonation, along with its meaning as the learners may understand the correct spelling and intonation. ➤ For each sentence the facilitator may refer to the position of subject, verb, object, subject complement, object complement etc. to incorporate the idea regarding sentence structure also. ➤ It is better to instruct the learners to note down the sentences for future proceedings.
Post learning-teaching process:	If total sixty (60) learners are there in the classroom, at the end of a single round of the activity, one learner will be able to learn the pronunciation, meaning with accurate intonation of total sixty one (61) sentences (first one by the facilitator and sixty by the learners).
Evaluation (formative assessment):	Marks should be given on the basis of, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promptness in sentence formation. ➤ Accuracy in sentence structure. ➤ Proper implementation of intonation. ➤ Correct pronunciation. ➤ Co-ordination with the previous participant.
Outcome (feedback of the students):	After completing the activity, learners' feedback should be taken with the help of the model questionnaire, mentioned below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you understand the structure of the sentences? Yes/No • Do you like to participate in this activity? • Do you think this activity is helpful to utter a sentence with proper intonation?
Further proceedings and chance of improvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The above-mentioned activity can be solicited more effectively with the incorporation of "stress". ✓ Digital sentence formation software can be used, if available. ✓ Inclusion of speech corrector will make the session more effective.

Table 3: Activity-III: Chatterbox channel game

Choice of the activity and justification:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To enhance collaborative speaking skills of the learners. ❖ To improve learners' thinking capabilities and expressions. ❖ To ameliorate idea, data and information. ❖ To develop effective listening skill. ❖ To understand the message of the other speakers.
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Brief introduction:	Speaking is the second most important skill in the sequence of listening, speaking, reading and writing to master a language. For a non-native speaker, it is always a challenge to practice her/his target language (here, English). Thus, the activity, "Chatterbox Channel" is effective to create a friendly environment for a non-native speaker of English.
Pre learning-teaching process:	Asking the learners to go through selected videos, audios, newspaper cuttings (whichever is available) as a preparation before this in-class activity.
While learning-teaching process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may take approximately 5-6 minutes for the facilitator to explain the activity clearly. ▪ Over all duration depends on the strength of the classroom. Approximately, it takes only one minute (1) for a single learner to speak her/his part. Consequently, for a classroom of sixty (60) students it may take (60*1 minute) = 60 minutes or 1 hour to complete the learners' part. ▪ Approximately sixty-five minutes (five (5) minutes of the facilitator in addition to sixty (60) minutes of the learners) is required. For a smaller number of students, the facilitator may allot two (2) minutes or more for each student to speak.
Classroom arrangement:	<p>Learning-teaching Materials: Writing board and chinks (if it requires for the facilitator to explain any point on the board). Learners' sitting arrangement: Learners sitting arrangement should be friendly enough that the facilitator may communicate with all of them easily and the speaker's voice is audible to her/his classmates.</p>
Learning-teaching methodology:	<p>➤ Facilitator's Role: At the very beginning, the facilitator will show learners the effective way to participate in this activity. ➤ Explanation: The facilitator should tell a common topic for all the learners.</p> <p>For example, the topic is, "By all means girls are better than the boys." Now, "Learner A" say in one minute, "I strongly believe that girls are better than the boys as they are more attentive in studies. Girls study well and work hard. So they get good marks also in the examination. On the other hand, boys are irregular. They are absent minded. Sometime they are not focused also. In our college also we can observe that the female teachers are better that the male teachers in terms of knowledge, care and effective teaching." Next the facilitator will request the next student, for example "Learner B" to speak for next One (1) minute in the same line of statement which means "Learner B" cannot change the mentioned line of "Learner A". "Learner B" is also bound to support "Learner A". Then "Learner C" will support "Learner B". Hence it will move forward. Now we know that "Learner A" says girls are better than the boys and she/he mentions examples from academic field. As "Learner B" is also bound to support "Learner A", "Learner B" may refer sports field in the same line of statement- "In sports field also Indian girls are more successful than the boys. In the last Olympics, all the Indian medal winners are girls. Our women cricket team is more successful than the boys' team. Sania Mirza in tennis, P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal in Badminton, Sakshi Malik in wrestling, Deepa Karmakar in gymnastics etc. are the few names who achieves name and fame both for our mother land India. Women are successful in sports administration also." Next "Learner C" will also maintain the same line by giving examples from other aspects and branches of our society. Thus, the rest of the learners will follow the pre-defined line of statement and continuously speak by gathering information from several fields of our society.</p>
Post learning-teaching process:	If total sixty (60) learners are there in the classroom, at the end of a single round of the activity, one learner will be able to come across different types of example one the single line of statement. It will enrich the learner as a listener and regarding information also she/ he is enlightened now.
Evaluation (formative assessment):	The facilitator may utilize rubrics for continuous and comprehensive evaluation of the learners' performance on the basis of their active participation, proper expression of their thoughts and co-ordination to the line of statement.
Outcome (feedback of the students):	<p>After completing the activity learners' feedback should be taken with the help of the model questionnaire, mentioned below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you enjoyed the activity? • Do you understand others opinions? • Do you think other speakers also maintain the same line of statement? Yes/No. • Do you believe that this activity helps you to think and express properly?
Further proceedings and chance of improvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The above-mentioned activity can be incorporated more effectively if it is possible to go through several videos, audios and other contemporary learning-teaching materials for the better understanding of the learners. ✓ Video recording (if possible) will make the learners more enthusiastic. ✓ For better improvisation the instructor may distribute the different areas to be covered by the learners under the same line of statement.

3. MORE RELEVANT ACTIVITIES

Below-mentioned activities are also effective and these should be performed by using English as the medium of communication.

- (a) After giving examples, learners are asked to write and speak five (5) sentences each on their tastes and distastes.
- (b) After the proper felicitation of the trainer each learner may be asked to tell at least two points to prove her/his superiority over the other learners of the classroom.
- (c) Learners may be encouraged to tell their difficulties; the any other student will try to give an interesting solution for the said problem.
- (d) In an open discussion forum, a bowl full of chits (with topic inside) may be given and the learners are asked to choose a chit. But she/he will not speak on the given topic. That learner will select one of her/his classmates to speak on the topic.
- (e) The facilitator may write a sentence in the mother tongue of the learners from any movie dialogue of song and tell the learners to translate the sentence from their mother tongue to English. Therefore, the learner may read it aloud.
- (f) In “Down Memory Lane”, the learners can be instructed any memorable incident/ occurrence of her/his life. As per their standard, the learners may speak two to five sentences.
- (g) The learners can also be asked to describe an abstract picture to enhance their reasoning skills along with speaking skills. In this activity pie charts or bar chart or line graph or histogram can also be used effectively.
- (h) Learners may be given any controversial family-oriented topic to speak about. For example, father vs. mother. Children always have a fascination either to their father or mother on the basic of their personal choices and preferences.

4. CONCLUSION

Speaking skills is the particular ability to transport, conduct and forward information, feelings and expressions through words, numbers and sounds of a specified language in order to convey opinions, facts, figures and positions directly or indirectly to the other. In a developing country like India, English is accepted as the “Associate official language” and it is respected as the symbol of empowerment in professional domain. But the limitations of Indian education system hinder the expected outcome to inculcate the expected level of proficiency in the speaking ability of Indians. Learner- friendly, infrastructure-oriented action research based constructive approaches are plausible to overcome these complications. Thus, speaking skills is elemental to effective communication skills and empirical activities are the indigenous efforts to achieve the target proficiency in speaking skills.

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