

Activity Oriented Learning Methodology to Enhance Reading and Communication Skills



English Language

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ABSTRACT

In recent days the habit of reading has become obsolete among public, and taken diverse practices among students. The reasons for this may be the technical advancements and inventions of the electronic gadgets. The noteworthy factor here is the predicament faced by the researchers in analyzing the excellence of one's reading performance due to discrepant practices followed. The aspiration of this paper is to implement activity oriented methodologies and practices to enhance reading skill among the selective informants.

INTRODUCTION

"Some books should be tasted, some devoured, but only a few should be chewed and digested thoroughly" is the perception of Francis Bacon.

Speaking about the requisite reading for the academic excellence in engineering education needs introspection into the myriad cultural background of a high percentage of students exhibiting ethnic diversity. However, sometimes languages and dialects bring up issues of possible discrimination due to the perception that some accents are more prestigious than others.

Methodology Practiced in the Experimental Group students

"Teaching English to Engineers is a delicate and demanding matter in terms of content, methods and techniques and deciding which is appropriate for this particular area of Engineering and English." Reimer (2002)

Vocabulary and Grammar are two pillar stones of any language. One who is well-versed in these two will be good in using the language effectively. The key differentiating factor between the English medium and the non-English medium students is the exposure level.

The English medium student will have undergone a systematic unwinding in learning the language and hence the platform is relatively strong whereas the non-English would have expressed themselves and their knowledge more in their native language comparing to English.

The primary requirement is to expose and strengthen the basics of an individual by helping and choosing relevant books and providing necessary guidance. It is not that the non-English medium students have no idea about the language but rather it is lesser usage and hence brushing and enriching the knowledge and confidence is necessary. One can have a systematic plan and methodology to fast track the learning. "Workplace environment demands effective communication, and as more jobs these days are done through team work, ability to communicate effectively through a common language among a multilingual workforce becomes very significant". (Malathy, P. 2010).

Each Class of 60 students was divided into 10 groups of 6 members each. Each groups were assigned with the below mentioned activities to improve their logical thinking, relative understanding and vocabulary.

Essence of the Methodology

The different methodologies that were implemented in order to enhance English communication were mainly based on the following ideas.

- Strengthening the Basics
- Improve Context Thinking.
- Improve Personal Expressions.
- Relating known and unknown.
- Presentation.
- Match the Original.
- Historic Techniques.
- Internet Usage.

The different concepts that were taught to the students through class room activities and games are as follows:

Strengthening the Basics

Strengthening the basics would be the ideal way and it acts as the backbone for further development in the future. The students were trained on the following to develop their reading skills and enhance their language proficiency and communication skills.

- Students were taught:
 - Antonyms.
 - Synonyms.
 - Idioms and phrases.
 - Word formation.
 - Transcoding graphics.
 - Picture perception.
 - Sentence structures.
 - Framing of sentences.
 - Odd man out.
 - Scrambled words.
 - Missing words.
 - Fixing the phrases and Identification of its meaning.
 - Framing sentence.
 - Matching the phrases.
 - Filling the blanks.
 - Answering the questions for the given passage.
 - Transcoding the given paragraph into picture.
 - Transcoding the given pictorial representation into paragraph and summarizing.
 - Interpretation of ideas through games and class room activities.

Improve Context Thinking

- Each group has been provided with a card containing proverb on it. One person from the group was asked to act out the words of the proverb and the remaining five members of the group were asked to find out the proverb.
- The groups were asked to select a video and play it by mute mode and were asked to speak the dialogues of the characters in the video.
- Blip- One student has been sent out of the class and a verb has been given to the class. The student who was outside the class has to find out the given word by asking yes or no questions by using the word blip in place of the

particular verb given to class.

Example: The verb given to class is writing. The question by the student outside class can be "Do I blip? Do I blip while eating? Do I blip while driving?" and so on.

- One student from each group was given a picture. The other members of the group were instructed to ask yes or no questions to the person with picture and the members were given time of five minutes to find out what is indicated in the picture.

Improve Personal Expressions

- "Students have difficulty in fully comprehending the technical terms as the relationship between the components of a technical term may not be easy to identify" (Malathy, P. 2010). After teaching the basics of vocabulary building through games and activities, the teams were asked to create a short story using vocabulary and idioms they had learnt. It was observed that the students discussed with their peers for idea generation and thereby brought the best in them.
- For transcoding graphics and picture perception, each individual in the team exhibited varied ideas and perceptions. Critical thinking skills were induced in each individual in the team. Each individual was engaged in the team work and healthy swap of thoughts and ideas were noticeable.
- 2 Pictures with slight differences were given and the students were asked to find the difference and speak on that in front of the class.
- Picture perception – looking at a given picture and interpreting what is seen in the picture is done by each student.
- A bunch of Cards containing words, idioms and phrases have been given to each group. The team members were expected to arrange the jumbled words, idioms and phrases and find out the implied story within the stipulated time of 7 minutes. The team was then asked to narrate the story with coherence.

Relating Known and Unknown

Though the students have lesser exposure to English language and usage, they generally would be good with their native language. So if they could correlate the English usage with their native language there will be much more effective learning since they can grasp the concepts easily.

- Exercises like writing word by word translation of a read article by the students have helped in improving their knowledge. The written documents could be used for future reference and revision. Guidance has been provided to make necessary correction and update on areas where the students failed to understand the actual message.
- Instantaneous verbal translation of an article by sound reading. This was in better exposure to more number of words. This method has helped in saving a lot of time and thus greater utilization of it. Students with some knowledge have been got into the second stage directly.
- Reading books that have a native language translation to it. At places of doubt and that needs clarification, students referred directly to the translation and understood the usage contextually. This method has been substituted with dictionary usage over the longer term.
- Translation of an article in mother tongue to English. Under proper guidance students have been given necessary feedbacks and support and have been helped in improving their knowledge. "Technical English is not part of the learner's general cognitive development. It is associated with conscious learning of a variety of subjects in school.

It is also associated with the acquisition and learning of mother tongue, which, often, is acquired first in the Indian context. Mother tongue directs this experience and thus become a major gateway to the concept of technical language. This inevitable situation in India challenges the English language teacher, especially those who teach English in engineering colleges, to devise ways and strategies to help their students overcome the influence of mother tongue and focus on newer concepts and the jargon attached to such concepts" (Malathy, P. 2009).

Presentation

- In order to become proficient in their second language, young children will need to acquire familiarity with the phonology to the second language, its vocabulary (typical everyday discourse as well as academic vocabulary), its morphology and grammar (Geva, 2006). Further, to become literate in a second language, it is important to have an adequate level of oral proficiency in that language (Bialystock, 2007).
- Within the closed loop of students who have been in need of guidance for improving their English and communication skill, presentations were encouraged.
- Students were asked to choose a topic of their own interest. Within a prescribed time students have to prepare and present on their research and learning.

Match the Original

- News reading and giving role play
- Enacting advertisements

Historic Techniques

The following Techniques have been encouraged and effectively practiced over years are always effective like:

- A Word a Day
- Newspaper and Magazine reading
- Regular Usage of Library
- Reading Comic Books
- Communicating only in English
- Watching English Movies with Subtitles

Internet

There are lot of articles and learning materials available in net. Nowadays Internet is a very commonly available source for learning. Resources like Games, articles with simple conversations, source of word, making words, exercises on grammar and usage are all available in the net. In the class room, students were given opportunity to access internet for finding out the given topic and along with enriching their knowledge on the given subject, they were also able to improve their language skill.

Benefits & Challenges

The benefits of the activities that were conducted were as follows:

- Understanding the plot of subjects being read.
- Better correlate the sequence and grasp the message.
- Improve the self confidence level in addressing their knowledge and learning from it.
- Improve questioning skill to understand any subject.

The key challenges that were faced during the activities were:

- Limited vocabulary.
- Inducing the confidence level to open up.
- Aligning students to the right thinking mode.

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