

Promoting Students' Interest in Learning English through Co-Curricular Activities

Datta G. Sawant

TACS College, Sengaon, Dist. Hingoli, Maharashtra

E-mail: dattagsawant@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

The present paper is an analysis of students' interest in learning English through co-curricular activities. It reports a small-scale research conducted in the author's college to promote students' interest to learn English with the help of some co-curricular activities, viz. student seminars, wall-poster presentations, weekly lectures on screen/projector and reading club. I and II year students (U. G. level) from three faculties were selected (Arts, Commerce and Sciences). In this experiment, two student seminars and two wall-poster presentations on different themes were organized. One lecture on screen/projector in a week was given for a month and a reading club was established to foster learning English. After completion of all these activities, feedback was collected from the students.

Introduction

The significance of English language and communication skills is accepted by almost everybody not only in the educational field but also in other fields of human activity. The English language and the importance of learning it have spread all over India, as it has produced immense job opportunities around the world. There is a progressive learning environment among students in urban areas. Urban students are grabbing jobs based on their communication skills in English, which is a good sign. But there is great difference between this situation and the one in rural areas. Most of the Indian villages do not have a good English-learning environment. They do not have adequate facilities required for learning English in villages. We have state government schools with scarcity of learning materials, basic

facilities and sufficient number of eligible teachers. This is true of rural Maharashtra.

As a result of this situation, the author tried to foster rural students' interest in learning English through some co-curricular activities conducted in an undergraduate college. The co-curricular activities included: Reading Club; A Weekly Lecture on Screen/Projector; Wall-poster Presentation; Students' Seminar; and Group Discussion. These activities were carried out in the academic year 2013-14; at the end of each activity feedback was collected from the students and analyzed.

Reading Club: In learning English, the basic skills of language are crucial – listening, speaking, reading and writing. For most of us in India, English is a second language; it is not our mother tongue. Most of our

students learn English through their mother tongue A Reading Club was established at the beginning of the academic year. The prime aim of this club was to develop the basic skills of English and all the four skills were covered through the various activities of the club. Students were asked to read aloud unknown texts/passages/study materials. Each student was given 5-7 minutes to read the text aloud while the rest of them carefully listened to it. Then reading and listening comprehension were tested by asking some questions on the text read aloud. The reader had to form sample questions to check the listening comprehension of other students. Students were then asked to write down their own comments on the performance of the reader and share their comments. The four basic skills were integrated in this activity. There was a very positive response (orally) to this activity from the students. There was also a positive change and improved confidence among the students. Many students participated in this activity.

A Weekly Lecture on the Screen/ Projector: Information and communication technology (ICT) has brought about changes in English language learning and teaching. Students need to know about various updates and new techniques of learning a language. The area of language research has expanded and students should be familiar with innovative teaching-learning methodologies. For this reason, a weekly lecture though on syllabus topics was introduced to the students. In this activity, a lecture was delivered using a screen/

projector every week for a period of two months. The students enjoyed the PowerPoint presentations prepared on their syllabus. They preferred ppt slides to direct lectures, which often become flat/boring for students as well as the teacher. Here students had scope to point to portions of the syllabus difficult to understand. There was no diversion of attention in the classroom while teaching; all the students focused their attention on the slides. The understanding capacity of the students increased to a great extent compared to the lecture-talk method of teaching. Students were given important points to discuss at the end of the presentation in a group discussion activity. All the students insisted on conducting all the lectures on the screen/projector. Very good oral feedback was obtained from the students.

Wall-poster Presentations: To increase students' interest in learning, they need to be involved in curricular and co-curricular activities. Such activities help them to learn a lot and achieve their goal. Students' participation in these activities is considered fruitful. Poster presentation is a medium to explore ideas and understanding. For poster presentation, students were given specific themes related to their syllabus and events happening around them. To motivate students, a competition was organized and prizes and certificates were given for some of the best wall-poster presentations so that participation of students could increase. There was very good response from students as they prepared many decorative, good content-based literary posters for exhibition.

There was an opportunity to observe the creative talent of students. Many students expressed their desire to have wall-poster presentations every month.

Students' Seminar: Building confidence is very essential for students to speak in English. It is the prime duty of a good teacher to develop enough confidence among students and prepare them for the challenge of speaking in English on the stage. The level of confidence determines the level of success of learning and students express themselves in front of other students. Considering this need, students were provided a platform in the classroom to speak from and interact with other students. They were asked to choose a favourite topic and prepare for the seminar. Seminars were organized every Saturday, so that many students could take part in the activity. Each student was allowed 5-7 minutes to give the talk. Many students spoke for the first time on the stage. Some students just read out the speech but many tried their best to express their ideas. This proved a very useful activity for both the teacher and the students as it gave feedback on the knowledge imparted by the teacher. Though it was an essential activity, it received a mixed response from the students.

Group Discussion: Students were asked to speak continuously on a topic given to

them. A group was formed of 5-6 students discussing a particular/ general topic. As it is very important to build thinking abilities of the students, the group discussion activity provided the right platform to share their ideas with others. The students discussed a range of themes and ideas in groups. The teacher had to supervise and facilitate the group discussion. The students wrote down important points and short notes while discussing a topic. These points and short notes assisted them in developing further arguments. In a span of 50 minutes, students could reach their best abilities of discussion and intellectual argument. The wide range of topics given for discussion covered local to global level. After completing the activity, the students were asked to write as homework essays on the topics they discussed. This activity also got a very positive response and feedback.

The scheme and plan of these activities had been provided to the students at the beginning of the academic year. After completing the last round of each activity, feedback was collected from all the students. A total sample of 71 students from three faculties (B. A.-21, B. Com.-20 and B. Sc.-20) had been selected for the experiment and feedback was collected. The following table shows the responses of students to five parameters on which the activities were judged:

Table 1: Student Feedback on the Co-curricular Programme

Sr. No.	Parameters	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1	Content of the programme	48	21	2	Nil
2	Informative and thematic relevance	33	28	10	Nil
3	Students' participation	31	32	07	01
4	Administrative facilities	18	34	11	08
5	Overall satisfaction with the programme	35	28	08	Nil

From **Table 1** it is clear that only one student expressed dissatisfaction with students' participation and eight with the administrative facilities provided. There was no dissatisfaction from any student with the other three parameters, including overall satisfaction.

The students' responses to the questions on the feedback form about the various activities are summarized in the **Table 2**:

Table 2: Student Responses to Items on the Feedback Form

Sr. No.	Checklist of Questions	Yes	No know	Don't
1	Do you like these activities?	66	Nil	05
2	Do you think these activities will help you in learning English?	68	03	Nil
3	Should these activities be continued in future?	65	Nil	06
4	Would you like to participate in these activities again?	62	09	Nil
5	Which activity you like the most?			
	a. Reading Club		18	
	b. A Weekly Lecture on Screen/ Projector		24	
	c. Wall-poster Presentation		14	
	d. Students' Seminar		09	
	e. Group Discussion		06	
6	Which activity do you think is not necessary/helpful compared to other activities?			
	a. Reading Club		Nil	
	b. A Weekly Lecture on Screen/ Projector		Nil	
	c. Wall-poster Presentation		Nil	
	d. Students' Seminar		12	
	e. Group Discussion		59	
7	Did these activities improve your learning?	56	Nil	16
8	Is your syllabus covered through such programmes?	60	11	Nil
9	Do such programmes help you in semester/annual exams in earning good grades/scores?	62	Nil	09
10	Do these programmes create an environment of learning English and promote the use of English?	64	Nil	07

We get a clear picture of these programmes from the students' responses to the questions. Almost all students liked these activities and preferred to be continued in the future. According to them, these activities are very important and useful to learn English; they also play an important role in teaching-learning.