

Learning English is FUNtastic

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation of English has given a good impetus to the Indians to learn this language. However, the teaching/learning situation is far from satisfactory. The disadvantaged children face their own hardships as it taught in a rarefied atmosphere. The present paper provides details about a project undertaken to strengthen their spoken English in a crash 20 hours programme to equip the children with necessary speaking skills. As a pilot attempt, this project conducted in 'Home for Hope' through an interactive method and was found to be successful. The whole programme was divided into two parts and the present paper focuses on the first part and briefly explains the methodology that was applied.

Keywords : *language skills, L₂, fun-filled activities,*

Introduction:

Globalization of English has created a demand for learning the language professionally. This has in turn created a demand for L2 learning in all fields. However the lacunae between students from English medium schools and regional medium schools; urban students and rural students is widening by the day. This has created a significant societal barrier between students of different categories. Understanding this aspect, the Literary Seminary of the Department of English of Dr. M.G.R Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, decided to extend a helping hand to the less privileged students. A minor project was taken up by the Convener and the members of the faculty to eradicate this gap through an outreach program.

Aim:

To strengthen the skills of students of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing through fun-filled activities.

Methodology:

The Children's Home of Hope near the University was selected for the study. The student population of this home was 87 students. The whole program was conducted for 71 students. The medium of instruction was both in English and Tamil.

Population:

All the inmates of Children's Home of Hope were divided in two groups based on their age. a. Group No 1:- 6-11; b. Group No 2:- 12- 18. All the inmates were girls.

The duration of the programme was for

a total of 20 hours spread across 5 days. Each day the students were engaged for about 4 hours.

The present paper reports the activities carried out for the first group in three days. These activities had a focus on helping the students get rid of their shyness and to promote their inquisitiveness to learn English with interest. A few students of the convener were selected to act as volunteers to teach and guide the students with the activities.

Activities- Group 1

a. Breaking the ice:

This was an interactive group activity which enabled the students to get to know the volunteers who were teaching them.

The rhyme “Jack and Jill” was selected. The students were made to recite a rhyme and notice the pronunciation and the rhythmic pattern in which it is recited. The children joined hands with the trainer to sing the song with action. Then they were asked to repeat the song by clapping their hands instead of saying the word “and”. This activity was done to test their observation and listen to the instruction. Though some of them failed in the first attempt, they managed to be successful during repeat programme and the joy was boundless when they became successful. So they understood their learning will be filled with fun. They got the idea about how further learning would take place.

The whole activity took 45 minutes though it was planned only for 30 minutes.

b. The Big Picture:

The big picture is an immersion activity for students. Students were divided into groups of three. The volunteers gave instructions and were present to guide them if they went wrong or even if one was inactive, the volunteers were very careful to use simple English while giving instructions. The children responded in their own language. Each team was handed over a piece of paper with a picture on it, this picture was a part of a bigger picture. The students had to reproduce the picture on a bigger scale on A3 paper. The objective of this activity was to involve them as a team and build in them team spirit thereby increasing their involvement in the programme. A healthy competition ensued that helped them complete the picture in less than 45 minutes.

c. Direct-translation technique:

The schools in India especially in Tamil Nadu introduce English in the first standard and they learn the language till they complete higher secondary course. However, English at all levels is taught as another content subject and not as a tool of oral and written communication. The L2 learners are not competent in syntax and semantics, and hence face problems of comprehension which is detrimental to producing conducive environment for acquiring language. It was therefore decided to adopt direct translation method in oral English and point out the errors of learning a language in this way. The following table highlights some of the problems faced in direct translation without adequate knowledge of the target language.

S.No	Tamil	English
1.	Ni ena seigirai	You what doing
2	Nain pa:dam ezhudigirein	I lesson writing
3	Pesadei keizh	No talk,listen
4	Potu pa:dugirargal	The sound making sing

As the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) method was one of the good old methods adopted by the linguists to teach L2, the same method was tried here also.

Students were asked to translate the mother tongue terms directly and replace them with words in English and rearrange them to form meaningful sentences. The goal of this activity was to reduce the time taken by them to think, translate and arrive at proper sentences in English and form sentences. It aimed to point out the structural differences in their mother tongue and English. Though many were happy that they could translate, a few understood that this was wrong. Three students could say that the sentence did not have verbs.

The whole activity took place in **30 minutes**.

After a break of 30 minutes children were re-assembled to go further into learning sentence structure and vocabulary

After a brief recapitulation they were asked to write on the blackboard the translate sentences with original mother tongue sentences. Surprisingly they could discuss and recollect in groups and write the sentences. Based on this further teaching took place.

d. Sentence structure and formation:

This led to the next activity of forming correct sentences. The objective of this activity was to help students form meaningful sentences by teaching them the structure and formation of sentences which are grammatically correct.

The following sentences were formed:

1. What are you doing?
2. I am writing a lesson
3. Don't talk, listen
4. They talk loudly

After writing these sentences on the blackboard, they were asked to compare the previous sentences with the present ones.

1. They understood the pattern of a question
2. The need for SVO pattern
3. Imperative sentence
4. The use of proper vocabulary

The whole activity took **60 minutes**.

e. Four Balloons:

The whole programme made them serious

and they started to wonder whether they would be able to master it. To ease their doubt, a playful activity was conducted to make them learn vocabulary. The volunteers did not go to the dictionary to cite the words but they were given a packet of 4 balloons per team of four. Each balloon had a letter which was revealed on blowing air inside it. Students had to stand inline to form words with the letters on their balloons. This activity helped them increase their word power. After forming a word one from each group would explain the word either through a sentence or miming its meaning.

The play-way learning took place for 40 minutes as it was very difficult to gauge their enthusiastic participation. They were eager to find out what scores others had achieved.

Feed back:

The feed back was collected by the convener

1. They liked the volunteers who taught and guided them.

2. Sentence structure was difficult for them
3. They wanted to improve their vocabulary
4. Some of them really wanted to come out of translation method
5. The new interactive methodology was preferred by them
6. They wanted to know when they would once again get a similar opportunity to learn.

Conclusion

This experiment which was conducted on a small group can be replicated in similar contexts on a wider scale. It can also be statistically established that the play-way method yields better results. The limitation of this study lies in not paying much attention to the control group. Efforts are on to expand the experiment in a more conventional research set up to reach out to challenged learners at large.

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