

Interactive Language Acquisition: Merging Activities and Technology

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Abstract

Pandit Jawaharlal rightly said, “English is the window to the world”. English became the tool that opens windows to the world, expands our minds to the latest technologies and unlocks doors to opportunities. This is not a sudden ascent of English to this position, but a gradual change. It is being used for more distinct and varied purposes than before. English in India is not just a language to be learnt but the base for whole learning process at all levels starting from schools to universities. As all other professional courses are adapted to the present day’s industrial needs, so is English language. In addition to the above changes, the competencies which are expected from global professionals, particularly of technical and business fields have changed the boundaries of English – learning processes. We have witnessed history as we stood the threshold of the 21st century, bidding adieu to the last and welcoming a new era altogether. This is an era of globalization where man has witnessed tremendous development in the field of technology. With the world turning into one global village, the modern man has developed the need of a global language. One of the major forces of globalization in India has led to an overwhelming demand for engineers across the globe. The last few years have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of skilled professionals in India, employed by both local and multi-national companies. With the whole world becoming one global market and result-oriented, professionals are facing new challenges in effective communication every day. Students of professional colleges require an ever-increasing range of skills to maintain relevance with the global environment of the new millennium. So proficiency in English enables the individuals to land better jobs in business and industry. That is why, there is a great demand for English and it has a lot of “surrender value”. It provides good social status in the community and we need English in the present-day context to be the bridge between us and the outside world. F.G. French said, “By accidents of history and by the rapid spread of industrial development, science and technology, international trade and by something like an explosion in the speed and ease of travel and by the factors which have been broken frontiers and forced nations into closer inter-dependence English has become a world language. It has opened world-wide chances for employment.” The object of this paper is to suggest some interactive activities in order to instill interest among students in learning English for equipping them with the essential skills. It enables and enhances learner’s proficiency in the use of English language as a means of self-expression in real life situations. The teacher has to introduce the Integrated Skills approach in the classroom that means teaching all the language skills weaved in one activity, is an accepted panacea for the problems faced by the teachers to cope with the time and need-based courses. Introduce the activities which aim to motivate and meet the needs of the learners.

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Introduction

As we all know that activities concentrate more on language in context than on teaching grammar, professional students are highly benefited by this. The activities primal focus is on the fact that English is not taught as a subject, separate from the students' real world; instead, it is incorporated into a subject matter in such a way that it helps them in their practical world and more correctly in their professional life (Spratt et al., 2011; Mohammad et al., 2024a; Mohammad et al., 2024b; Al Daboub et al., 2024). With improved listening, reading, speaking and writing skills, the technocrats of today can certainly prepare our country to establish itself as a power house of tomorrow's global economy.

Literature Review

The target students for any professional course are young adults. The teachers are expected to act as facilitators and pave way for 'experiential learning'. Learner autonomy has to emerge as one of the results of teaching-learning process in professional courses. When the technology is changing at such a rate, we as teachers have a great role to play. We need to update ourselves with the changes in technology on a regular basis (Öztürk & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Mohammad et al., 2024c; Mohammad et al., 2024d; Hujran et al., 2023). One has to remember that "to teach is to learn again." As you see from Figure the mirror image of "teach" is "learn". If the teacher ceases to learn he/she do not dare to teach. A good teacher should always be a good student throughout his life.



Figure: 1

Thus the old Techniques for handling language classes are out of place. New and innovative techniques are to be adopted as per the needs of the professional courses the students take up. Teachers have to be creative in generating appropriate activities as per the skills the students are to learn in the course. They need to design activities which can engage the students both physically and mentally. It should be a source of motivation for them. As Carl Tan (2023) puts it, "Teachers, to be facilitators, must first be real and genuine, discarding masks of superiority and omniscience. Second, teachers need to have genuine trust, acceptance, and a prizing of the other person—the student—as a worthy, valuable individual. And third, teachers need to communicate openly and empathetically with their students, and vice versa."

OBJECTIVES

Makes the learning easy and instill interest among the students

Develops the confidence of the students

Makes the students to think creatively

Removes the fear of speaking before the people

To improve their LSRW skills

To make them employable

Makes the students to compete with the others

Methodology

Integrated Skills through Activities

Developing language skills is a matter of how to activate the students optimally in their work with adequate material, exercises and assignments in the classroom. Organizing the students in groups (in pairs or in groups of 3 or 4 students) is probably the most efficient method to activate all students as much as possible during the class. These activities should give students an understanding of workplace realities, and motivate their language acquisition.

Listening

Unlike hearing listening demands total concentration. No phrase is more often repeated in the New Testament than the saying that only those who have ears can hear. It is repeated seventeen times in all. Power lies more in listening than in talking. In fact listening is the key skill of the successful person. A good listener alone can become a good speaker or good writer. Listening effectively and emphatically not only enhances professional advancement but also opens the doors of self-development.

Speaking

In the traditional college set up the much neglected are is the skill of speaking, as the teacher alone takes a central role and the learner plays a passive role and does nothing but listening. The art of speaking paves the way towards self-development. As the speaker tries to influence others, he thinks deeply about the ideas, invents arguments and facts to convince others and creates a healthy environment for conversation. In this process he widens his knowledge of the subject and also learns the psychology of others. In speaking pronunciation plays a dominant role. Winston Churchill rehearsed his speeches hundreds of times in front of the mirror. Such type of rehearsing enhances public speaking skills in a terrific way. So in educational institutions an ideal atmosphere has to be created by conducting seminar and group discussions and students must be motivated to participate in them.

Reading

According to Francis Bacon "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man." It is the most important tool in all academic advancements. We derive much pleasure from reading novels and poetry. Our vocabulary is broadened as we read newspapers, magazines and journals. When we open the books, we open the doors that swing wide to unlimited horizons of knowledge, wisdom and inspiration that will enlarge the dimensions of our life. The works of Dale Carnegie and Stephen Covey should be 'tasted, chewed and digested' in the words of Bacon.

Writing

While speech comes to us very naturally and spontaneously, writing comes after serious practice and careful organization of thoughts. In writing the grammar rules have to be rather strictly followed. It is easier to understand written communication than oral speech as it allows ample time to the reader to read and is less prone to errors. Writing makes an exact man. While writing both clarity of thought and clarity of expression are essential. In order to improve these integrated skills I suggest a few activities. It improves the overall development of the students.

Shrinking story

This activity improves the Speaking + Listening comprehension + writing skills of the student. Teacher has to select one small story. In this activity the teacher has to select 5 students among the class and asked to leave the class. The rest of the class is read out a story twice and after the second reading they have to make a summary of the story. Then the first student asked to come in and listens to the story once and he has to reproduce the same. The second student is also called in and listens to the story. The rest of the class note down which of the important points are mentioned. Student 2 tells the story to student 3, student 3 to student 4, and student 4 to the last one. Student 5 tells the story to the class. Using their notes, the students who were listening and observing, report on the changes in the story. Then the original read once again.

Story

The teacher has to select a small story with confusing names, things and places. For instance Mr. Bejan Daruwalla and his wife Roshini along with his two children Reshma and Rashmi arriving at Bangalore from Mumbai by flight No. IC370 at 7.30am. They are being met at the airport by their estate Manager Rustom Shapunji, who will take them in Mercedes at 10:30am via Cunningham Road, Longford Town, Trinity Circle and Arugodi to celebrate Rashmi's birthday.

When I conducted this activity in my class I observed so many changes in the story like Daruwalla changed into daruwaja, Shapunji changed into shampooji, Arugodi changed into Pakodietc... These kinds of activities improve their listening ability (Mohammad et al., 2024e).

ESCATALK

Through this activity we can improve speaking and listening ability of the student. Allot 30mts for this activity. The teacher has to organize Groups of 8 students. 4 to 5 groups. Students should repeat an idea. In this activity students are supposed to make chain sentences using one of the words used by the earlier speaker.

Consequences

It improves the skills of Speaking and thinking creatively. The teacher has to organize Groups of 3-6 students. The teacher gives each student an action card. Each group should think of the short term and long term consequences the action may have. The group leader has to note down all the consequences. Then the groups exchange the cards (Mohammad et al., 2024f). They groups discusses the consequences of each action. Finally after the discussion each student has to give a presentation. For instance:

A 48 hour working week is introduced

Robots can perform household duties

Man canalso get maternity leave

A lorry driver dumps a thankful of poisonous wastes into the river near the town.

PMI (plus, Minus and interesting)

The teacher has to organize the students as groups. Three groups of 10. It can improve the skill of Reading, writing, discussion, presentation, questioning and clarifying. Allot 100 minutes. Procedure: Students must think of the plus points, minus points and interesting points about a given topic. Each group will come out with ten points. Each group will then put their ideas in order of importance and they have to select one person to represent them. He or she makes a presentation. This is followed by a questioning sessions. At the end of the presentation the whole class will vote on the three most impressive ideas (Mohammad et al., 2024f; Mohammad et al., 2024g; Mohammad et al., 2024h).

Topics:

Child marriages

The importance of arranged marriages

Rising the age of retirement etc.

Ranking

It improves the skills of speaking about preferences, describing personal qualities, asking and giving reasons, contradicting etc. The teacher has to organize the Groups of 4 the whole batch. Procedure: The teacher gives a handout of a certain list which the students reliability, strength, honesty, intelligence, generosity, caution, sense of humor, stubbornness and helpfulness. Finally the whole class should try to reach a consensus.

Optimist and pessimists

It improves the skill of speaking and expressing different points of view. Procedure: Two teams one student from Team A (optimists) should make a statement which a student from team B should oppose. Then it is the turn of Team B to make a statement which a student from Team A would oppose. Leaders from each group will note all the statements and then evaluate them.

Iceberg or Onion

It improves both writing and speaking skills of the student. The teacher has to organize the students in pairs or groups. They will discuss the following questions. Some people think that culture is like an iceberg, other people think that it is like an onion. If culture is like an iceberg what is below the water and what is above? If culture is like an onion, what are the different layers?

Writing an Agenda

It improves the skills of both writing and speaking.

Procedure: The teacher has to give the photocopy of a case study and ask them to plan an agenda for the meeting. For instance

Setting the Agenda: Agenda for the meeting on _____

Item 1: _____, Item 2 _____, and Item 3 _____

Speaking to the world

This activity improves the creative thinking and writing skills of the students. Procedure: The teacher has to say to the students that you are the first person to land on Venus. The whole world is waiting to receive your first message from Venus. You have 25 words to convey your first feeling about the stunningly beautiful planet.

Multi – Tasking

This activity focusses on one's ability to concentrate on different things at the same time. It tests memory, numerical skills and social skills of the students. The teacher will give instructions to the students. Allot 30 minutes for this task. Procedure: one student stands at the table and has to count the currency notes set between pages of a book and coins of different denominations sprinkled all over the table. While doing so he/she has to answer various questions asked by the students politely and with a smile and proper eye-contact.

M.E.L test: (Memory Efficiency Level)

This is a wonderful activity. At first students may think that it's very simple but it's a little bit difficult. It tests the memory power of the students. Procedure: The teacher asks the first question to the student then the student is not supposed to answer the question. When the teacher asks the second question then the student has to answer the first question. Like this it follows up to twenty questions.

Supplying questions

It improves the question framing ability of the students. The teacher has to give short replies to the students and asked them to supply questions to them. For instance:

Ten miles

For an interview

Three wickets

Yesterday

Surya and Vamsi

Now its students turn to frame the questions like Ten miles – how far your house from this college.

Lexis

Through this students can improve vocabulary skills. The teacher has to give a word to the student and ask them to write the different kinds of meaning like root of the word, denotation, synonym, antonym, lexical sets, prefixes + base word and base word + suffixes, compounds, collocations and finally figurative meaning. For instance: Take the word clear.

Vocabulary items	kick (verb)
1.Denotations(meaning of the word)	To strike out with foot or feet
2.Synonyms (same or similar feeling)	power, strength, thrill, enjoyment
3.Antonyms / opposites	Start, take up
4.Lexical sets (groups of words that belong to the same topic)	Kick stand
5.Prefixes + base word	None

6. Base word + suffixes	Kicked, kicking, kicks
7. Compound words (hyphenated words or two or more words)	Kick – boxing , kick – start, kick – down
8. Collocations (words that often occur together)	Kick about, kick around, kick back, kick in, kick off, kick out, kick over
9. Figurative meaning (idiom or phrase)	Kick the bucket, kick the ball out

Teacher can also prepare some words and asks the students to arrange them according to the vocabulary items.=eading from the script:

This activity improves the vocabulary of the students. The teacher read the selected news item from the news paper loudly. The students listen to the news with proper attention. The teacher instructed the students that while they are listening to the news paper article they need to pick up as many words as possible except pronouns and write the meanings and antonym for those words. It works to improve the vocabulary of the student. When I was working in K.L.Univeristy the students wrote 100 words and they felt this activity is very interesting and useful to enrich their vocabulary.

Swot Analysis

It can identify the problems of the student in learning the language. Through this students will know the strong and weak points one's self.

Procedure: The teacher has to frame the questions to know the knowledge of students in English and ask the students to answer. Questions like..

What are your strengths in English?

What are your weak points in English?

What are the opportunities for practicing English?

What stops the students getting better in English classroom?

Role plays

The importance of role plays cannot be under – estimated in activity based teaching. When students take part in a role play, they get into the psyche of the role and this influences their thinking (Shlash Mohammad et al., 2024a). They learn to “think on their feet”, ask relevant questions, take decisions, resolve conflicts, organize their thoughts, and listen attentively and above all they come across the fear of speaking before others and they can communicate effectively.

Group Discussions

Through this activity students learn how to talk among the groups and they come up with their own views. It is based on team work, incorporating views of different team members to reach a common goal. Procedure: students are given a topic. After sometime, during which they collect their thoughts. The group is asked to discuss the topic for 20 to 25 minutes. It allows students to exchange information and ideas and gives them the experience of working in a team.

Information Gaps

Through this activity student improves the writing skills.

Procedure: Teacher has to ask the student work in pairs. They have to ask questions about his partners' daily routine. For instance

Get up?	When do you get up usually?
Breakfast?	***
School ?	***
Lunch?	***
Evening?	***

Go out?	***
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Preference Line

This activity improves both the writing and speaking skills of the students. The teacher has to select the topics which can instill interesting among the students. Procedure: the teacher will give topics to the students and ask them to form into groups. Then the students have to discuss with their respective groups and write their ideas. Topics for a Preference Line–

Love marriages

Arranged marriages

Living in a big city

Living in the country

Home work

No home work

Joint families living together

Nuclear families living apart

Describing people /place /things & pictures

Students need art of describing to be the best they can at describing their best qualities; particularly in highlighting their key strengths. The teacher will give some hints to the students then students have to describe the people/place/ things and pictures (Shlash Mohammad et al., 2024b). For instance if we give these kind of pictures shown in the figure not only motivates them but also gives the scope to think.

Data Analysis

Role of the Learner

Learning is an active process. Students are actively involved and are accountable for their learning. According to Grennon Brooks, the learner controls their own learning, not the teacher. Learners are given freedom to express their opinions and viewpoints. Learners should also exhibit their knowledge every day in a variety of ways. The learner would be asking questions in the classroom setting. They would communicate an interest in the actions and would begin interactions with others. The learner also would make decisions, and be confident in their skill to share their thoughts and opinions with others. In addition, the learner constructs relations with previous experience. All of these characteristics involve the learner to be an active participant. Integrating technology into the classroom has become imperative for teachers at all grade levels. Almost all schools and colleges today have language lab and many also have internet connections. When handled effectively, technology can have a positive impact on student learning.

Findings

Thus we (teachers) need to do a lot of experiments, innovations and pedagogical variations in the classrooms to improve the Integrated Approach in teaching and learning of English. It is found that even after learning English for so many years in schools and colleges, students are not able to speak English in real life situations. The object of this paper is to find out some pedagogical applications to teach integrated skills effectively through activities to make students more pro-active in the use of the English language in real life situations.

Conclusion

To conclude, I found it profitable to use these activities experiment to teach integrated skills as most of the students became motivated and friendlier to use the language quite fluently. The teacher must be a researcher and also a learner. Other roles assumed for teacher is needs analyst, counselor, and group process manager. He or she must be a good motivator because motivation accelerates language learning. Sense of humor and presence of mind are two important characteristics of good language teacher. Teacher should have good attitude and aptitude as well. This kind of teaching / learning through activities takes the “pain” out of teaching any language and makes learning to communicate effectively a “pleasure” for the student. According to Shiv Khera “the best teachers will not give something to drink, they will make you thirsty. They will put you on a path to seek answers.” These activities can be used to stimulate ability of the students to converse freely. Students will come up with their new ideas.

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