The Effect of Using Classroom Activities in Promoting the Ability to Learn

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Abstract

The current study is an attempt to examine the extent and the effect of applying classroom activities in promoting the ability to learn English as a second language. The sample of the study is 20 students enrolled in the English Department in the Almarj Faculty of Education. The aim of this study is to discover the extent and the effect of applying classroom activities when teaching the students in classrooms. Data were collected through using a questionnaire, which consists of some questions relating to the topic of the study, that was distributed to the sample of the study. Date were analyzed according to the assessment criteria posited in the study. The results of the study showed that there is lack in using classroom activities when teaching students and this problem cause the students to face challenges in the process of language learning. Some recommendations were offered to help both the teacher and the students in improving and highlighting the abilities of learning and teaching English language.

Keywords: Language activities - faculty members.

أثر الأنشطة الفصلية في تعزيز قدرة التعلم

إيمان ونيس عبدالنبي البراني و عبدالرحيم فرج هارون

الملخص

البحث التالي هو محاولة لدراسة أثر ومدي تطبيق الانشطة اللغوية داخل الفصل في تعزيز قدرة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، عينة البحث هم 20 طالب من كلية التربية المرج المقيدين بالفصل الثالث والسابع والثامن بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، تم جمع البيانات عن طريق استبيان تم توزيعه لجميع طلبة العينة بحيث كانت لهم الفرصة الكافية للإجابة على أسئلة معينة تتعلق بموضوع الدراسة، وتم تحليل البيانات وفقا لأداء وصفية احصائية لتقييم اداء الطلبة، واظهرت نتائج الدراسة بأن الطلبة أبدو مستوى جيد في الاجابة على أسئلة الإستبيان والتي في معظمها متقاربة حيث كان من الواضح بأن الطلبة يواجهون مشاكل في عدم استخدام الأنشطة اللغوية من قبل أعضاء هيئه التدريس داخل الفصل وفي الجانب الأخير من الدراسة قدم الباحثون بعض التوصيات لتساعد كلا من الطالب والمدرس في تحسين جودة تعلم وتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الانشطة اللغوية – أعضاء هيئه التدريس .

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Teaching English as a second language is principally seen as a message that has certain thoughtful and cultural aims. Teaching, in general, is viewed as a communicative way that acquires between the teacher and the learners, through which learners can get particular amount of linguistic and social knowledge. However, language teaching is considered to be a challenge to many English teachers, particularly those whose native language is not English. Knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching and learning English language skills are looked up as one of the learning objectives of many TESOL teacher-education programs in many academic institutions and universities around the world [8].

In fact, it is believable that the learning process cannot mainly be created without the teaching process. Both of them are considered crucial elements in the field of education and each one completes the other. The teaching and the learning abilities are seen as integrated components underlying the activities of the students and the teacher. Thus, they need to be well recognized and be given great emphasis in order to build successful learning environment.

[2] argues that the function of the foreign language in classroom is a medium through which teachers teach and the learners demonstrate what they have learned. As we know, when learning, there is certain amount of knowledge at each stage. Thus, the teachers use the second language in classroom to control both the form and the content of language interaction. The leaners' role in this situation is to respond to the teachers' use of the language and try to practice and communicate effectively. In addition, the researcher adds "the overall pictures of classroom communication depends rather on the types of relationships between teachers and learners, and the actual patterns of communication established and maintained during regular lessons''

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As being a teacher, it is well observed that there are a number of students who still face difficulties in learning and using English language although they spent a lot of years studying English specification. Therefore, this study is principally devised to investigate the effect of applying classroom activities in promoting the ability to learn.

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1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary goal of this study is to know the effect of applying classroom activities in promoting the ability to learn.

1.4 Research Question

This study is based on the supposition that some of the students in the English Department in Almarj Faculty of Education still have problems in learning English. The problems that encounter the students may due to challenges relating either to the process of learning or teaching. In fact, there are some aspects of the teaching process that may be considered to be a challenge to some students particularly those whose mother tongue is not English. Thus, the research question is stated as follow: What are the extent and the effect of applying classroom activities in the Department of English in Almarj Faculty of Education in promoting the ability to learn English as a foreign language?

LANGUAGE TEACHING

2.1 The Skills of Language

Language as a human conception is a social mean of communication that distinguishes humans from animals. Language does not only mean a collection of a group of words or sentences, but it is an arranged social process through which learners can contact.

Actually, without language, we cannot communicate or make sense. Language is not only essential for the formulation of a particular sentence or thought, but it is part of the thinking process itself. Any language in the world has basically a set of skills through which people can communicate together. Generally speaking, language learning includes simply four main skills that are considered to be the key focus of both language learning and teaching. These skills are divided into two types: two receptive skills (reading and listening) and two productive skills (speaking and writing).

[6] says that reading and listening are called receptive skills because when we listen and read, we receive language while writing and speaking are called productive because the learners can produce either written text or oral presentation when using them. All the language skills involve mastering the basic linguistic forms of language that are grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Without doubt, these language abilities do not work separately; thus, it is essential to integrate all of them together ensuring equal amount of concentration, time and

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practice to each of them. [13] argues teachers should shed high standards for an ESL classroom. They should work to create the necessary conditions for the learners to learn effectively and reach the desired results. For teaching of English to be successful, the four language skills should be integrated in an effective way. They should be addressed in a way that helps the students to gain the standards that are set for them and improve their communicative competence gradually.

2.2 Teaching English

Teaching English as a foreign language is not an easy process, particularly for teachers whose mother tongue is not English. It is a systematic process that needs to be well prepared and presented. Teaching English is a mechanism that has several stages and needs providing appropriate environment to create successful teaching practice.

In the field of teaching, it is essential to provide two important components while teaching in a classroom, the theoretical and practical sides of the lessons. In more details, the theoretical part of the class appears to be the teacher's responsibility that should put great emphasis on the ways of conveying information to the students while the practical side often shows the actual results of the theoretical part of the lessons that often appears in the students' response to the teacher's activities or to the evaluation stage.

There were many theories and teaching ways followed by many academic researchers that were developed along times. Concerning this point, the most recent ways of teaching emphasize two aspects that can be divided into two categories: the teacher-centered approach and the learners-centered approach. The major crucial aspect that received a lot of attention is the learners-centered approach that is based on activities that the learners carry out in the classes. Learners-centered approach focuses on the learners' work in classroom. In other words, the learners' responsibility is to cooperate to do all the tasks relating to the process of their learning. The teacher' role in this approach is a facilitator, only control the class. This approach is seen as the most effective and active direction in the field of teaching since it is helpful in engaging the students in the process of learning and help them to better understand and think deeply about the course content.

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2.3 Classroom Activities.

There are many factors that often influence the development process in second language learning and teaching. Therefore, teachers need to take into consideration how to manage teaching activities that are available within their teaching context [14]. Teaching activities and their role in improving the process of language learning and teaching have been a matter for many academic researchers during the latest years.

[10] defines teaching activities as elements of the task that determines what the students must involve to practice in comprehending, manipulating or interacting in the target language that principally focus on meaning rather than form. [11] states that communicative language teaching can be developed by practicing language within a real communicative context that have to include role play and group work. The researcher views that negotiating meaning, correcting misunderstanding, and using communication strategies can promote the ability of language learning and teaching instead of focusing on the surface levels relations that cause breakdown in communication.

Some academic researchers argue that the students' low level of performance in English is due to disconnected ways in which language skills are taught using different activities in classrooms. Language teaching activities should aim to develop the basic communicative language skills and the activities should be developed in a way it shows each skill as a being constituent of the language [3].

The researcher also emphasizes that **''If activities are meaningful for the students, they will feel more motivated to participate, and this will create an enriching teaching-learning process. Because of the connection between the teacher's activities and the students' response to them, it is necessary to look at language teaching activities and their impact on the students''.**

How to employ teaching activities and how to manage them in the classroom play a significant role in promoting the ability of teaching and learning whatever the negative or positive results are. They have positive impact on the students' response because they increase the student's motivation, deepen up topic interests and improve the students' communicative abilities. Teaching activities considered to be an evaluating process through which the whole class can contribute. They answer the question how the students were

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learned?. Teaching activities are a measuring mean that help to know if students are taught and learnt correctly or not and show if the students understood or misunderstood the lessons being explained. Feedback then plays a vital role in enhancing the ability to convey information since it is a way of fitting information through correcting mistakes either through the general discussion between students and the teacher or between all the students together.

2.4 Approaches to Teaching English

The major strategies, methods and approaches to teach English as a second language play a crucial role in language learning since they are considered to be the basis of the process of teaching language. For many years, there were different views and a lot of concern about how to teach English language, particularly to learners whose mother tongue is not English. In addition, many academic researchers proposed different types of approaches and directions for teaching English in classroom. Two approaches were used a lot by many academic teachers and researchers. They are the direct approach and the communicative approach.

2.4.1 The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach to teach English as a second language appeared when linguistics and researchers found that learners have the ability to use the language structure correctly [4]. The primary goal of language teaching in this approach is enabling the learners to use the language for communicative purposes [5]. The teacher's role in this approach is a facilator or observer and his/her main responsibility is to establish situation and learning environment for the students in order to promote effective English communication [15]. In similar meaning, students should be provided with opportunities in order to practice communication. Everything that is done in the classroom is done in order to encourage and practice communication in an authentic real life-situations. The teachers observe the use of the language in communicative events in real social context and appreciate the students' performance then provide feedback for their incorrect use [7].

2.4.2 The Direct Approach

The main aim of this approach is to enable second leaners to communicate in the target language. When applying the direct approach, only the target language is allowed and the mother tongue is forbidden. In similar meaning, instead of correcting errors or translating, teachers should demonstrate and monitor the use of the language. Learning in this approach

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occurs through a lot of series, conversations, gestures and visual aids rather than focusing on correcting mistakes [1]. [12] describes the principles of the direct methods as follow:

1-Only everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught.

2-Oral communication skills are built in carefully graded progression organized around question and answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.

3- Grammar are taught inductively.

4-New teaching points are introduced orally.

5-Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.

6-Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.

7-Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.

8-Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

2.5 The Teacher's Role

When teaching English as a target language in a classroom, the teacher has the most efficient role in both the educational and the learning processes since he/she is responsible for conveying information to the students. Relating this aspect, there are many ways that teachers can follow to help the students to create effective learning process.

- Make suitable curriculum that suite all the levels and the ages of the students.
- Using educational teaching aids in classroom.
- Applying the most effective teaching methodology.
- Using the modern ad developed methods when teaching.
- Choosing the best places to teach the students in a way that each class should include a limited number of students in order to control the whole class and to better practice.
- Focusing on the style of teaching in presenting information since the style of teaching affects negatively or positively on the students' performance.
- Using classroom activities in each class because they are effective in developing the students' communicative abilities in learning and using English language.

2.6 The Learner's Role

"The design of the instructional system will be considerably influenced by how learners are regarded. A method reflects explicit or implicit responses to questions concerning the

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learners' contributions to the leaning process" [12:23]. [9] thinks that one of the learning development is mixing class time in which the learners have the ability to make decision about "what to learn, how to learn and how to be evaluated". The students have to participate in utilizing classroom activities that are based on cooperative work rather than individual work. The learners have to be confident and comfortable to work with their partners in class, rather than depending on a teacher as a model. They have to take part of a great responsibility about their learning process [11].

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 Research Strategies

Methodology is the specific step that the researcher follows in collecting the data from the sample of the study. The data are analyzed according to the type of data collected. After analyzing the data collected from the sample, the researcher summarizes the results of the study and draws conclusion. The current study depends on quantitative results. Thus, it is regarded a quantitative study.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The participants in this study are 20 students enrolled in the Department of English in Almarj Faculty of Education during the academic year 2021. They are students from third, seventh and eighth semesters. They are all native speakers of Arabic. They are 3 males and 19 females aged between 20-32 years of age.

3.3 Instrument of the Study

The instrument used to collect data in this study is a questionnaire that consists of fourteen questions about the topic of the study. The researchers selected the samples and distributed the questionnaire paper to the participants. The participants were asked to answer certain questions about the topic of the study. The questions were chosen on the base of their importance to the research topic. Each student was given enough time to answer the questionnaire questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researchers began to analyze the data by looking to every sample and checking the participants' responses. Notes were made about both the items that

affect positively and negatively on the teaching process. The range of scores for each item on the scoring protocol was identified and calculated as percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The primarily aim of this research is to discover the effect and the extent of applying classroom activities when teaching in classrooms. Thus, the current chapter presents and discusses the results of the study based on data collected from the participants. Evaluation of correct and incorrect responses were noted. The scores were calculated using the tool of descriptive statistic. The data were presented in table forms that are divided into two main sections. The first section begins with the evaluation of the participants' performance according to the assessment criteria and the second section presents overall performance in percentage form.

4.2 Assessment Criteria

The students were directed to the same questions about the same topic and all the participants had equal amounts of time to answer. Students were asked to answer certain questions about the same topic that is "using classroom activities when teaching''. A scoring protocol was devised to mark the students' response. It appears in table (1). Data were collected by a mean of questionnaire that was given to 20 students who were enrolled in the third, seven and eight semesters in the Department of English. Data were analyzed statistically based on the responses of the students.

4.3 Analysis of the Assessment Criteria

This section of research presents the analysis of data collected from the participants. The analysis of data was based on the students' responses when they answered the questionnaire questions.

Through the analysis of data, it was noted that some teachers followed certain strategy when teaching the second language in a classroom; they taught without focusing on the basic elements that needed when teaching in a classroom. Clearly, the majority of the students demonstrated good responses to the questions relating to applying classroom activities. In other words, 90% of the participants agreed to apply classroom activities while 100% agreed that they are supportive elements in that they encourage them to learn more and more. It was

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viewed that, through data analysis, teachers tended to teach English language in old ways. In a similar meaning, most of the teachers tended to just present information without giving attention to the practical side of the class. Thus, the students suffered challenges in practicing the linguistic aspects and the language skills they were taught. Generally speaking, it was observed that most teachers neglected the importance of applying this aspect and its role in creating an affective learning process.

It was obvious that most of the students lack training in utilizing the practical side of the class and this lack may due to the fact that the students did not practice unless they are forced to, mostly for exams and in certain skills. Possible reason for this challenge is that some teachers may have thought that doing these activities would take a lot of time, so they could not finish quickly and for this reason, they ignored them.

In my opinion, part of the obstacles that challenge the students in the process of learning may due to certain points of weakness that are relating to either the teacher or the surrounding environment. The surrounding environment can be represented in providing adequate rooms, laps, visual aids, modern instruments and devices that help to improve both the processes of learning and teaching.

Another observation was that 95% of the participants agreed that most teachers in classroom did not prefer to use teaching activities that help them to promote their abilities of learning. In fact, some teachers still use old techniques when teaching in classroom. They usually tend to put more emphasis on the first stage of the teaching process that is presentation and neglect the most essential one that is practice.

Part of the teachers' deficiency can also be due to lack of developing techniques that help to develop the process of teaching. Another possibility may due to the fact that there are certainly some teachers who are not well qualified; they are still new teachers. They often lack experience in the field of language teaching. Another possible reason is that there are some teachers who are not specialized in the field of language teaching. They are specialized in the field of translation science that neglect definitely focusing on the aspects of language teaching. Actually, according to my experience in teaching English as a second language, there are some teachers who do not prefer to use classroom activities because they see that they are ways of wasting time since they just present the theoretical part of the class and

neglect the practical part because they often prefer to leave the class early. Others think that their responsibility is only to convey information without applying the practical part; they think that it is considered the students' job to do that. Furthermore, other teachers do not upgrade and develop their academic language level; they remain at the same level of their specialized knowledge. In other words, they do not attend modern training programs and conferences relating to developing ways and aspects of language teaching. According to my experience in learning a language when I was a student, the teachers who taught me did not use these activities when they taught us. They just presented the theoretical part of the lesson; there was not any application or attention to provide the practical sides of the lessons being taught.

Through the analysis of data, it was clear that the majority of the teachers did not prefer to use classroom activities and did not encourage using them in a classroom. This appears in the students' response to the questionnaire questions relating to these items that have scores of 85% and 70% . In addition, most of the participants agreed to apply them in a classroom because of their importance in creating and improving their abilities in learning a language.

Table (1) : Overall Scores

CASE	TOTAL SCORE=20	PERCENTAGE
1	17	85%
2	18	90%
3	16	80%
4	18	90%
5	20	100%
6	17	85%
7	16	80%
8	18	90%
9	13	65%
10	7	35%
11	13	65%
12	17	85%
13	19	95%
14	14	70%

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Table (2): Overall Grades and Percentages

Evaluation	Percentages
Excellent	8 - 40%
Very good	2 - 10%
Good	3 - 15%
Poor	1 - 5%

4.4 Statistical Analysis

The use of statistical analysis clarifies the process of data analysis in quantitative research. For this reason, the data collected have been subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to test the research question posited in the study. The percentages of errors for each case in the scoring protocol were calculated and the results were taken as an indication of the students responses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that using classroom activities is interactive process, through which learners can work and communicate together, that promote the ability to learn effectively. However, there is a challenge that definitely weaken the process of learning and this challenge appears in lack of using classroom activities when teaching in a classroom. Therefore, the importance of this aspect in the language teaching and its role in developing language proficiency and communication need to be recognized.

5.2 Recommendations

The results of the present research emphasize the urgent need to insert a solid basis for English language teaching, particularly in the area that relate to applying classroom activities in the early levels of language study to create better results in the learning process.

In academic English, it is difficult for the teachers to bring the students, whose mother tongue is Arabic, to the stage of mastering the skills of language. Consequently, there are some points that both the teacher and the students should follow in order to build successful learning and teaching processes. Teachers should raise the students' awareness of using

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classroom activities inside and outside classroom and insist their vital necessity in learning the target language.

With regard to applying classroom activities, some learners like to learn about the technical side of the language while others like to practice language as being a mean of communication to express what they think and what they want to convey. Therefore, teachers should try to use a variety of approaches; helping students to engage in the process of learning in different ways.

Great consideration should be given to the course design. In this respect, textbooks should have an ample amount of knowledge and instructions that emphasize all the aspects that are required when teaching and learning. Moreover, it is of extreme importance that teaching English be taught by specialist teachers with experience in field of language teaching. Teachers should also choose the best methods and techniques to teach English with great focus on applying the three main steps needed in the teaching process that are presentation, practice and evaluation. Moreover, it is of great necessity to emphasize, from time to time, the role of the evaluation process of classroom activities and ensure the effect of its results on the students' learning.

Actually, practicing English needs suitable environment for both the teacher and the students in order to help them to create successful learning and teaching processes. In other words, there should be well-equipped rooms, laps, data shows and visual aids and modern devices for practicing English in different efficient ways.

Without doubt, English teachers have a significant role in both the stages of teaching and learning. Thus, the teacher' responsibility is to change the students' attitude toward learning English by motivating them to do their best to use and practice inside and outside classrooms. This would help them to build their confidence toward learning English since learners with positive attitude and motivation are more interested in learning a language.

Generally speaking, using classroom activities should be used in classes as early as possible and in each class; this would help the students to build a strong foundation for learning the language.

Students should be given more opportunities on how to use English language in classroom in that they should be provided by enough time to practice. In addition, teachers should divide

class time in which more time is given to apply class activities like presentation, general discussion and working in groups. This way is helpful since it leads to improve and highlight the abilities of their communicative performance.

It is helpful for the teachers to use visual aids when teaching since they are effective in simplifying the process of the students' understanding. In addition, Teachers should encourage the students to work together inside and outside classroom. In classroom, students should be divided into groups and be allowed to work together, instead of working individually, and discuss topics of English in groups. This way will help them to think deeply about the topics content and help to increase additional energy to the whole class.

More importantly, two aspects are considered essential components when teaching. These components are "time and place''. Classes' timetable should be given much and extra time in order to give the students chances to do all the aspects needed when utilizing classroom activities. In addition, it is good for the students to be well distributed, in that each class should include a limited number of students in which the teacher can control the whole class and can do all the issues relating to using classroom activities. Another important point is that the department and the faculty should have a role in developing this aspect by helping the students to visit places outside the faculty in order to more practice English in real situations.

The evaluation of students from time to time is of vital necessity in enhancing the ability to learn since assessment of students' performance help to understand the area of weakness in both the process of learning and teaching. Thus, some remedial work can be suggested as a solution to the challenges that both a teacher and the students face.

Emphasizing the continues contact with all the staff in the department is significant part of both the processes of learning and teaching, since it leads to know all the obstacles that face the students and the teachers and try to find solutions and upgrade the teachers and the students level of performance in the field of teaching and learning.

In addition, teachers should be encouraged to attend modern programs and conferences and follow recent studies about issues relating to language teaching particularly in the area that belongs to using classrooms activities; this way will help them to develop their knowledgeable level and improve their performance when teaching in classes.

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