

## ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF ESL PRIMARY STUDENTS THROUGH ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

At primary level students learn through meaningful activities. Being a teacher of grade four and five from a researcher's prospective it became clear that while teaching in Grammar translation method (GTM) most of the students were not able to understand the lesson and what perceived was a lacking context and being boring. On the contrary, the Activity Based learning (ABL) is very helpful in raising the interest of the students and to make them learn in friendly environment. The aim of present research is to highlight the fact that ABL has proved to be more effective in teaching students by inventing or creating, and ABL equips teachers with many activation arms in order to manage the students according to their mental and physical context. The tool of data collection was based on interviewing from the teachers to know that to what extent they consider ABL as an effective learning method to magnify the creative effect regarding the student perception. The students were put under observation by the implementation of various learning activities and random sampling from each class i.e 3rd to 5<sup>th</sup> grade (ten) students were observed. A close ended questionnaire having Yes/No options to know the response of 10 teachers of three private institutes of District Jhang regarding the efficacy of ABL was distributed. The results remained almost 88% as the teachers were already using some of these activities which according to them are inevitable for student learning at primary level. The participation of the students in various creative activities did put a healthy effect not only on students but on teachers as well. Teachers were in view of shifting from GTM to ABL as this is a student centered method. Hence this research recommends further new activities which may be helpful in raising the quality of student learning at grass root level. These activities in the class and outside the class room in both environments proved to be effecting on the students and teachers in a positive manner. Such learning activities change the perception of learning as a whole and make the learning canvas broader and colorful.

**Keywords:** Activity based learning (ABL), Grammar translation method (GTM), Lecture based teaching, learning, primary level.

### INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan it is stated that English is second language and practical analysis shows different images as in departmental offices like health, education, judiciary, foreign affairs, and army and in private sector as well as all official documentation is being done in English. In private educational setups at the basic levels English is being stresses at spoken level as well. The kids at play group and K.G level are being taught the basic phonemes so that they can take English as their primary language from spoken perspective. The schools or a teaching institution is considered to be the best place of learning and polishing a child. The learning

which is developed in a class room lasts forever. A child is taught not only a text based curriculum but also a hidden curriculum which consists of co-curricular activities and ethics. The vantage of an effective teaching method has been a serious talk among teachers and educationists in Pakistan as most of teachers are still under the influence of old teaching methodologies. Our syllabus and methods both require innovations, as our syllabus includes such contents in which activities are less and cramming is necessary to get good marks. By cramming students creativity gets minimized. The method is a comprehensive frame work meant for a proper and appropriate presenting outline of lingual material whose no word or content is in contrast or conflict, and whole context is built by a distinct methodology. It should be noted that methodology is axiomatic in nature and method itself has procedural nature. We can attach numerous methods with a single approach. ( Anthony 1963, p. 63-7- apud Richards and Rodgers, 1999, p. 15). The grammar translation method is being used widely specially in GOVT schools. It has been defined as that the GTM is an old or classical method which was implemented in Europe from 1840s to 1940s. It is method which is not based on any learning theory and has no language theory as well, the entire focus is on two skills only-reading and writing,as minor attention is given to speaking and listening. The GTM emphasis is on learning and memorizing rules of language rather than its practice, it is a deductive approach as the rules are told and the practice comes later and focus is on accuracy (Brown, 1997); Richards and Rodgers, 2000).

So educationists felt the need of some innovations in exiting methods and started including some activities in classroom. These activities were the apart of ABL because the method was same but teachers invented or introduced some more activities according to their need. And when they realized the weaknesses of students and their different thinking ways they started finding out solutions and one way or the other started using activity based method (Hopkins & Harris, 2000).

The process of activity based learning depends upon learning by creating or doing. The students learn through experiencing things by their own hands and creating by their own minds. The true education comes by stimulating the child to put himself in activities and discover things and these activates can be individual or in groups (Dewey, 1929).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Background**

The activity based learning which is now widely used as a method in many of private schools was basically implemented by John Dewey in 1896. John Dewey, a great educationist presented this theory of teaching students in creative and natural environment during his tenure with the University of Chicago. Here he laid the foundation of a university laboratory school which later turned into the “Dewey School”. In this school many experiments were made to reform the ways of teaching in schools and to introduce innovations in teaching methods. In this school of Dewey students were the active participants who learn by practical implementation. Dewey wanted to make a place which can change the old techniques and methods into new teaching principles which include mental activity and the enhancement of creative skills (Chambliss, J.J (Ed.), p. 146). In 1906 Dewey worked with Columbia University where he continued to develop his philosophy of learning by doing by publishing several works which include Democracy and Education (1916), and Experience and Education (1938). Dewey’s philosophy behind building the Dewey school was to replace the old educational ideas and philosophy with some revolutionary new things. Dewey stressed over the fact that educational process should be constructed over a strong and experienced

theory. He is of the view that both traditional education and progressive education should not be supported but human perception and human exposures to life should be preferred while planning the new effective educational plan (Dewey, 1938).

It was because of basic dimension of Dewey's philosophical research that lots of analysis and educational sampling was made in order to enhance the educational techniques. Even in the present days Dewey is considered the most innovative and fundamental with his approach.

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The research on the effective methods of teaching has shown that lecture method where the student's performance is passive, may have been implemented in schools since decades. It was an old tradition when teacher arranged all the teaching material for those students who had limited or less activity oriented behavior. The purpose of the teacher was to deliver lectures and the participation of students was passive, the basic objective of the teacher remained that the students' involvement during the lecture should be at peak level. However it was noted that students' response regarding a proper involvement was not up to the mark. (Johnson, Johnson & Smith 1998, cited in Ahlfedt, Mehta & Sellnow, 2005, p. 25).

The creativity or innovations were given less importance and the curriculum was Teacher Centered. It was up to teacher to choose any method of teaching without concentrating on students' mental level and interests. Now different researches have approved that Activity based learning is most effective than lecture method. As this is student centered and students learn by doing. Everything that a student learns through practice or hand on activity is everlasting (Fallows & Ahmet, 1999).

The children must learn by practicing not merely listening passively, they must put themselves in problems and find out their solutions by themselves. The children should be provided with a supportive environment in order to sharpen and bring to lime light their creative skills. Teacher should plan his lectures keeping in view that students involvement in various activities is made sure and their minds are stressed enough to gain the required creative threshold ( Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p.78 ).

As most of the educationists were busy in implementing new curriculum in schools in which the syllabus should be project or activity based. The activity based method was implemented by John Dewey who made many researches in inventing new activities which could enhance creativity of students. He is considered to be the prominent educational theorists of twentieth century. His "Experience and Education" is considered to be the best statement. Teacher's role is not to put knowledge in the minds of students but its main purpose is to find out those activities which can help students to create something by doing. (Dewey, 1987). Dewey worked a lot and emphasized on teaching students in creative environment. He believed, therefore in these so called expressive or constructive activities as the centre of co-relation (Dewey, 1987). Now modern educationists in Pakistan are in favor of teaching students by project or activity based learning and it can also be called situated cognition (Green, 2006 ). It is fundamental to analyze that how Activity based approach was implemented in the schools of Pakistan. Actually most of the students in Pakistan are under the influence of text book board syllabus in which cramming is a necessary element. The creative power of students goes far behind and they become slaves of conventions. As students are taught in overcrowded classrooms in which student's questioning and lively discussion is missing, so our experts felt the severe need of a method which can polish the students' inner abilities.

## Research Objectives

The research has following objectives.

- 1 – To develop a method consisting of different activities to provide students a friendly atmosphere.
- 2 – To enhance creativity and vocabulary of students by engaging them in some activities like story writing, writing a review of their favorite story etc.
- 3 – How many activities can make them familiar with proper utterance of words by working on their pronunciation skills through related activities?

The ABL is now implemented in many private schools of Pakistan in which various activities are being done by the students to learn in a creative and friendly environment. The school heads and teachers are trying their best to include some more creative activities to raise the interest of the students as sill teachers feel many problems while teaching the students with different mental capabilities. So, the distinction of this research paper is the introduction of some more methods which can enhance the learning skills of students in a friendly environment. In this paper suggestions are being made relating to techniques of ABL for the teachers by which they can make their lectures or lessons not only interesting but also creative. These strategies may enhance the creativity of students and they can learn by doing or experiencing. For this research, the following questions are posited:

- 1- What methods can be developed to make the students study in a friendly and creative environment?
- 2- Which activities can be creative and beneficial in ABL?
- 3- Which activities are most effective and feasible for students and the teachers?

## Delimitation

This research is limited because the number of students picked is limited in number and on the basis of this survey it can be stated that ABL is most effective and creative.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology which has been named as qualitative research is distinct in the sense that it enables the people who are carrying on their research regarding a technique to get to the basis and foundation of success and challenges by inquiring and probing the concerned ones (Patton, 1990: Maykut and Morehuse, 1994). Context, procedure, implanting and concerned commodity were compiled and presented by the researcher in constructing the model qualitative research technique. (Stufflebam' s model cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1983). The qualitative evaluation research design was constructed for this study. The data were collected through interviews from the teachers which consist of questionnaires and the observation of the students. Some questions were made on YES/NO options and teacher's views were taken in this regard. Students were put in the suggested activities and the responses were noted through observation tool. From class 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, 32 students were put in the activities with the help of the teachers in the prominent private school of Jhang.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The focus was on the enhancement of the creativity of the students to make them learn through completion of activities. The researcher used several activities in the class which

helped students to not only learn but to communicate as well. The teachers also participated and observed the students involvement and interest. After that the designed questionnaire was filled in by the teachers to what degree they find these activities most interesting and beneficial in class room and how much they are effective. The impression of the teachers appeared to be quite positive and they really were convinced regarding the efficacy and simplicity of the ABL. For instance:

NS stated that “I have experienced a totally new dimension from learning perspective by the implementation of such activities in the class. My students are also convinced that GTM should be replaced by ABL on instant bases”. HS said that “I did not expect that this new learning process will have such magical effects on the students and even on myself. The ABL has changed the way I use to perceive about the aspects of student learning and it has provided a fresh energy to carry out the teaching process in a positive manner”.

The analysis of this research was done by interviews from the teachers and the observation of the students by putting them in the activities mentioned below. The result of this data collection remained 90% as the both teachers and the students appreciated these activities and considered them to be used by the teachers in the class rooms to make the learning most effective and creative. So after collecting appropriate data collection and exploring the views of people this research includes these strategies in ABL on the basis of research results.

### **Chain stories**

It is a very beneficial activity for enhancing the creative skills and vocabulary of the students. In my point of view teacher can create a class room activity by dividing the students in four or five equal groups. Teacher may write topic on the board and she can ask the groups to describe the main parts of the story e.g. one group will create the introduction of the story, second groups duty is to describe the problem or the buildup portion of the story , third group will describe the solution and the fourth and final group will convey the ending of the story with a moral lesson. This activity can be oral or written depending on the choice of the teacher but it is very helpful in enhancing not only the vocabulary but also the inner creative skills of the students. As in groups students will share their ideas with one another and different minds together can create or invent something new or extraordinary.

### **Findings**

- 1: It exercises a very positive and creative effect on the behavior of the involved individuals including students and teachers.
- 2: The attitude of the students changes and their response becomes more positive and encouraging.

### **Puzzle Games**

At playgroup or nursery level the activities like puzzle games work tremendously to improve the learning skills of the students. Teacher can arrange some puzzle games in the class to keep the children busy and to make them learn as well.

### **Findings**

- 1: Such games test the IQ and creative temperament of the students?

- 2: Such activities help to provide a comfortable and convenient learning atmosphere?
- 3: The mentioned activity also helps the students to tax their mind on regular basis to bring out and utilize their creative potential at maximum level?

### **Brain storming**

According to me at the start of the lecture brain storming is necessary because it simulates the lecture pattern and flow in the minds of children in easy and correct manner e.g. if teacher is teaching comprehension and she has a story related to that lecture then she can briefly give an idea how to do it. This session may be about five to seven minutes.



Figure 1. Pair work activities

### **Findings**

- 1: The lesson becomes interesting and easy.
- 2: The curiosity of students is aroused before the start of the lesson.
- 3: The environment of class becomes friendly and creative.

### **Group work**

Different researches have approved that group work is more beneficial than individual efforts because students with creative minds share their innovations and learn quickly and easily. For example if teacher is teaching nursery or kindergarten students about primary and secondary colors she can make groups of four to five students each and ask them to draw and color their favorite object. When students will bring different colored objects it would be easy for both students and teacher to understand the ongoing activity.

- 1: These activities help to create mutual understanding among the participants.
- 2: The mentioned activity also plays a vital role to magnify the mutual trust level between the students.



Figure 2. Group work activities

### Individual activities

There are some individual activities also **that can be included** in ABL approach.

#### (a) Interview activity

This is really an excellent individual activity to sharpen the creative, reflective, thinking and learning skills of the students. Different tasks and topic oriented interviews help out in making the learning process interesting easy and fluent.



Figure 3. Individual activities

#### (b) Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys are carried out to collect the correct and efficient data in order to make sure those researches and to be published or written information makes true impact in the terms of knowledge and learning. Students are assigned different surveys for their learning enhancement during the surveys they come across different learning phases which enlightens their sense of creativity and leaves a deep impact on them regarding their acquisition of knowledge.

### Findings

- 1: Every child has different likes and dislikes.
- 2: Teacher can know about the interests of the students by using these activities.

## Quiz and competitions

In different educational setups Quiz and other inquisitive competitions play a very vital role in order to motivate and compel the students for search of necessary and helpful information to stand supreme in the gallery of their specified group or class. The urge to win the competition dominates every student's mind which drives his efforts in a positive direction always. This attitude of students creates a competitive and learning environment which also helps the teacher to keep the learning process flowing and constant.

## Findings

About twenty students of grade four and five were involved in this research. All these students prepared their speech on their favorite topics and took part in the competition.

## Advertisements and flyers making

This is a creative activity of ABL approach which I have used in my class most of the time and I suggest that this should be used by teachers. As teacher can ask the student to advertise a thing and share their ideas in form of a colorful flyer.

## Findings

- 1: This activity reveals the interest of the students.
- 2: Teacher can engage students in a meaningful activity to learn about the use of persuasive language.
- 3: It enhances pupil's learning and creative process.

## Case study

During this research it was noted that most of the children's way of grasping the knowledge was very weak from Case study perspective. They only preferred tales which were explanatory in nature. Some students liked and preferred it but some were having ambiguities about it. So an activity was arranged to make students participate and understand it. The research found that the content in various topics and their themes had citizen touch, political influence in Pakistan and the culture of Punjab etc. this activity was divided into three parts:

- Perception and understanding of Case studies.
- Quiz based activity to collect data about the topic.
- Preparation of outlines.

## Findings

- 1: The research in the context of Case Study proves that students of rural and urban areas possess a distinct and separate attitude.
- 2: The main emphasis of case study is on formal and informal writing discussion which highlights different writing abilities of students.



### **Formal and informal discussions**

Most of our students at primary level are unaware of formal and informal writing or discussion. Even they are unable to distinguish between formal and informal letters, what are their rules and why are they written. In Activity Based Approach approach or method we can include some activities like we can make two groups of students, one will communicate in formal way and other in informal way. This will really make students clear about the difference between both of them.

### **Findings**

- 1: Students communication improves considerably
- 2: It gives boost to pronunciation skills of the students.

### **Role plays**

This is really a tremendous activity of Activity Based Approach. It really helps in building the confidence of the students and the vocabulary as well. The communicative power of students gets strong and they are able to speak fluently. In my point of view teacher can assign students some task on which they have to collect information and speak or perform.

### **Findings**

- 1: It includes physical and mental participation of students.
- 2: Students learn by doing.

### **Writing techniques**

During my research I used these activities which are different and effective in raising writing powers of pupils. These are the activities of Activity Based Method which may give 90% results in not enhancing writing skill of students but also their vocabulary.

- Writing stories on their favorite topics.
- Fantasy and fiction writing.
- Continuing the story.
- Writing recepies.
- Report writing.

### **ANALYSIS**

Everything needs a change and in educational institutes it is the need of hour to use student centre curriculum and methods. As we know that some years before teacher was the centre of educational process and everything was dependent upon his will, but now the criteria **are** changed. Now the focus of the educationists is to measure the interests of the students and to find out suitable ways or strategies to make their learning creative and quick.

### **Change in students and teachers attitude**

There should be a change in the behaviors or temperaments of students and teachers as teachers should plan their lessons before delivering them. Teachers should be trained about

using **activity based learning** in class according to students' capabilities. Students should be involved in meaningful activities and teachers' participation should be active and **creative**.

### **Students' involvement**

On the basis of research it may **be** said that the participation of the students bring a positive change **not only** in the progress of a teacher but also the whole educational institute. However, there may be some suggestions regarding the improvement of **education in schools**:

- The participation of students in curricular and co-curricular activities should be compulsory.
- There should be a parent-teacher meeting in all schools to fill the bridge of communication gap among teachers and parents.
- The emphasis should be on effective methods of teaching and learning.
- The environment of the class should be friendly and comfortable for all students.
- Evaluate the prevailing culture and promote positive and dominating culture.
- Relate the internal situations that relate to positive innovations.
- To note and to constitute enhancement ongoing.

### **Concentration oriented teaching and learning processes**

Few indicators are there which either by direct involvement or through **in direct learning approach** and its affectivity constitute the methods of gaining and retaining the knowledge. As on Pakistan the educators and teachers face many problems to enhance creativity of students by implementing these strategies. As appropriate text books or instructional material is not available. **Similarly** lack of resources like\_ no availability of A.V aids, proper teaching material and refreshing learning courses etc also **affect** teaching and learning processes.

### **CONCLUSION**

Teaching and learning both are interrelated. It is to note that learning is born through teaching and a proper supporting role in conveying part of the teacher magnifies the grasping effect upon the students.

So this research approves that ABL is helpful for teachers and students as it develops the understanding of the students. As this is a very crucial responsibility of teachers to develop the learning and creative skills of the students, so ABL provides them guidelines to improve their teaching by including different activities. The main task of the instructor has been defined as that he maintains a proper context of the learning subject with the day to day routine. It is necessary that the teacher should have the ability to convey the knowledge in a comprehensive and easy manner to the students by maintaining a comfortable environment in the classroom. A perfect and comprehensive lesson and activity planning must be made by keeping in view the environment of the class and perception threshold of the students. Suggestions were made about creating opportunities for the teachers for the enhancement of learning techniques in order to sharpen the abilities of the students and to give a new shape to the learning model.

It is the need of the hour to train the teachers on ABL approach and Task based language teaching (TBLT). Moreover, the syllabuses should be designed in such a manner that it

covers all the aspects regarding the modern learning techniques in most possible, simple learning sphere.

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