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Testing and Teaching Vocabulary Employing Student Centric Activities

Abstract

English Language is one among the few prominent global languages at the present time. Though English is a foreign language, it has significant role in the Indian Education system at the present time i.e., 'English Medium of Instruction' is the order of the day in India and in particular in South India. Hyderabad is no exception to this fervour. Most of the educational institutions offer, parents prefer, and majority of the students show interest and undergo English Medium of Instruction during their schooling and at junior college level. Yet, it is disappointing to note that knowledge transfer is hardly taking place in most of the schools and junior colleges particularly in 'English Language Skills'. In reality, firstly it is evident from the short falls in students presentation, in their talk and interaction. Secondly, the inability of students to make use of precise vocabulary contextually. Hence, the faculty made an attempt to teach vocabulary by conducting the small scale research making use of testing tools and employing student centric activities.

Key words: English language, Vocabulary, Student Centric activities

Introduction

English Medium of instruction is the common known mode of education in Hyderabad at the present time. In spite of the fact that majority of the students go through their schooling and Intermediate (10+2) education in English medium of instruction, yet the intake in Engineering colleges show that it is a heterogeneous and at least 50% to 60% of students need some basic inputs in strengthening their English language skills so that they will be able to meet the minimum requirements in the present scenario of global working culture to communicate.

Based on the above, it was felt that the involvement of students in the activities play a major role in strengthening the English language skills and to meet the following objectives.

Objectives

To test the vocabulary of the students

To make them realize their shortfalls

To create interest and involve students actively

To teach the vocabulary contextually

To enhance students vocabulary corpus

In order to meet the objectives, the following methodology is adopted.

Methodology

Extensive Reading

Oral presentations within the group

Oral Presentations to the Class

Feedback of the presentations and guidelines to improve vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary contextually while narrating short story

To test, teach and carry out the small scale research, 34 students of ECE-3 of third year Engineering are identified as subjects. As a first step, extensive reading activity is conducted for them as follows:

Extensive Reading Activity:

Students are asked to sit in groups with a maximum of 4 students per group. 'Father's Help', a short story is extracted from "Malgudi Days", a collection of short stories written by R.K. Narayan. The story is prepared as handouts and distributed to all the student groups to undertake extensive reading. Students are furthermore informed to form an imagery i.e., mental picture of overall story. They are suggested not to stop reading and check for the meaning of a new word(s) that they could not understand in the story while reading. They are asked to understand the overall plot of the story while reading.

After extensive reading, students are asked to present the story orally in the Group as a next step of the activity.

Oral Presentations within the Group

Students shared the story orally in the group. It was observed by the faculty that some of the students are finding it difficult to articulate the story though they have the overall imagery of the story. While some students could do it, with the vocabulary of their own choice. Faculty moved from group to group interacted with the students, helped them realize their ignorance, shortfall of English language vocab, the importance and the need for improvement in the vocabulary.

At the end of this activity, faculty identified certain students who are not able to articulate the story even after reading, and listening from their group of students. Similarly, also identified some students who could articulate the story well.

The brief account of the short story 'Father's Help':

‘Swami’, a fun loving school kid, always busy in games and sports. He is doubly busy on holidays such as Saturday and Sunday. Hence, he finds it very difficult to go to school on Monday morning. It was Monday morning, trying to escape school, complains ‘headache’ with mother and stays at home. His father observes, insists on Swami to go to school. Swami, initially complains headache, and later changes stance. He shares lurid account of his teacher Mr.Samuel’s violence on late comers. All his efforts were in vain and Swami was asked to go to school by his father as challenge. Swami, knows his father, prepares to go to school. In the meanwhile, Swami’s father writes a bulge of letter and asks Swami to submit it to the Head Master of the school. Swami finds out from his father that it was a letter of complaint on Samuel, his teacher. Based on this his teacher Samuel will be dismissed by the headmaster and will be arrested by the police. Swami tries his best to make his father withdraw the letter but of no use. Swami on his way to school, felt he was the worst perjurer on earth. To justify what was written in the letter, tries his best to incite his teacher Samuel during his arithmetic class but fails miserably. Swami played all his tricks and attempts once again during last hour when Samuel came back to their class to teach history. The enraged Samuel canes swami to stop him from yelling and disturbing the class. After the class, jubilant swami goes to the headmaster room only to find it locked. Finds out that he is on leave for another one week. He returns home, without submitting the letter to Mr.Samuel, the assistant headmaster. Swami’s father tore the letter and remarks Swami as coward you deserve your Samuel.

Presentation of the Story to the Class

Students identified are asked to share the story as elaborately as possible in the group. During the presentation of the story by students with shortfalls, faculty observed carefully the gaps in the presentation of the story, their struggling to coin the precise words, the needed vocabulary to share their imagery of the short story.

It was also observed with a note of joy that there are some students who are good and not only capable of presenting the story but also captivating the audience with their outstanding presentation skills and vocabulary of their own.

Faculty Feedback and guidelines to improve vocabulary

As part of the feedback, faculty shared the reasons for short fall of vocabulary and inability to present the story as follows:

- i) Lack of English language skills
- ii) Fear of presentation
- iii) Lack of presentation practice
- iv) Lack of English speaking practice
- v) Lack of English speaking ambience and
- vi) Lack of constant motivation and willingness to enhance vocabulary

Guidelines shared to enhance vocabulary in English language:

- i) Regular reading of Literature such as Novels or Short stories
- ii) Reading of English Newspaper particularly Sports Column or the Columns that they are inclined to or special weekly editions
- iii) Watching English News channel and paying attention to articulation of ideas/news
- iv) Watching English Movies with sub-titles
- v) Watching English Web series regularly
- vi) Sharing and discussing the short stories regularly to the friends, classmates and family members

Faculty also shared that the students could clearly observe the shortfalls of their English language vocabulary which made them feel and realize the need to improve. It is also

observed and shared with students that almost all the students shown interest in the reading activity, participated wholeheartedly in sharing the story.

Therefore, the faculty has taken up teaching vocabulary through literature employing student centric activities.

Teaching vocabulary contextually while narrating the short story

Faculty shared the short story teaching the words while narrating the story, appreciating the context, how relevant and precise the words are, giving the meaning of the words along with the pronunciation of the words. Also sharing the inputs as to how one should understand the new word contextually. Faculty also shared how these words will enhance their ability to express in English language effectively and invited to students to quickly make use of these words and frame sentences practically and contextually with numerous examples. This evoked a lot of response from the students and created interest in the activity with a spirit of competition among students. The students shared their sentences using the words discussed. Some of the words discussed are:

Wail – verb – A prolonged high-pitched cry of pain, grief or anger.

Example: ‘Swami let out a wail’.

Jolt – verb – Push or shake (someone or something) abruptly and roughly.

Example: The crowd at the exit gate jolted Swami forwards.

Stubborn – Adjective – Having or showing dogged determination not to change one’s attitude or position on something, especially in spite of good arguments or reasons to do so.

Example: A stubborn refusal to learn from experience.

Apprehensive – Adjective – Anxious or fearful that something bad or unpleasant will happen.

Example: Swami felt apprehensive about going school lately.

Lurid – adjective – presented in vividly shocking or sensational terms.

Example: The lurid details of the violence of Mr.Samuel were too frightening for the children.

Perjurer – Noun – A person who wilfully tell an untruth.

Example: Swami, the perjurer, complains headache to skip school.

Conclusion

Students' centric activities helped the faculty to identify the various short falls of the students. Activities helped the methodology adopted to teach vocabulary rather than directly giving the words and meanings. Activities also enabled the students to participate in the session actively and attracted their attention. It was also observed that they like learning through activities particularly when short stories are employed. It was a satisfactory experience to the faculty teaching vocabulary and actively engaging the students to make them learn.

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