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**Interactive Techniques in the Language Classroom -  
An Activity Based Research Study**

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**Abstract**

Language learning and teaching can be an exciting and refreshing activity for students and teachers. This atmosphere of excitement and trust can be created where confident students initiate and cooperate in imaginative activities, sharing with each other real messages in authentic and exhilarating interaction. In a second- language situation, interaction becomes essential for survival in the new language and culture, and students need help to cope with styles of interaction. Interaction involves listening to others, talking to others, and negotiating meaning in a shared context. Students can increase their language store through a wide range of interactive games, activities, and tasks. It has been noted that language teachers have to consider the classes with informal atmospheres which are most appropriate environments for communicative language practice.

**Introduction**

English has been taught in the educational institutions for quite a long time, yet the students feel handicapped in using it effectively in and outside their classrooms. The reasons are many and manifold but the most obvious and glaring is the use of faulty

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methods of teaching and learning the language at various levels of education. The methods so far used have been considered as a mechanical process of learning and teaching without considering its cognitive aspects. The learner is considered a mere appendage in the learning/teaching process and the teacher is a mere agent who transfers the set material from the higher authorities (the government or board of studies) to the students with no consideration of their present needs.

The examination system enables the teachers to test the learners' memory and luck alone and not their competence in the various language skills. All these factors have led to a serious set back to the quality of education.

A shift therefore needs to be made if the language learning/teaching has to yield positive results. The interactive method in English language teaching with its learner-centered focus can help in equipping the students with adequate skills to use language communicatively in different situations. In fact, language is a creative process with the learner playing a pivotal role. Communication is an interaction between people who have something to share.

If communication is to be the objective in foreign language teaching, then interaction must be present. If skillfully handled, interactive classroom techniques can promote learner initiative and autonomy, which, in turn, will ensure successful language learning. Since real communication interaction is a collaborative activity, classroom teaching and learning activities must be interactive in nature.

### **Interaction-Defined**

Interaction is central for communication. It is viewed by Brown as “the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other.”(159)

Wells has defined interaction as follows “Exchange is the basic unit of discourse ... Linguistic interaction is a collaborative activity” involving “the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context of situation”(29). Interaction involves not just expression of one's own ideas but comprehension of those of others. One listens to others; one responds (directly or indirectly), others listen and respond. It is an ability to create meanings by exploring the potential inherent in any language for the continual modification in response to change, and negotiating the value of conventions rather than conforming to established principles. All these factors should be present as students learn to communicate.

Human interaction has been defined as a process whereby two or more people engage in reciprocal action. This action may be verbal or nonverbal. Thus, for the purpose of teaching a language, teachers mainly focus on the verbal interaction or communicative

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interaction (Cummins, 1994) without separating the nonverbal interaction that is present at an early phase and which has been called the silent period. As considered by Ilola, Matsumoto and Jacobs the interaction that occurs in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom or English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom is of great importance during the learning process.

Merely putting students in groups isn't enough. Student interaction needs to be structured to match instructional goals. In the ESL /EFL classroom, developing proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking the target language, as well as acquiring knowledge of culture, are core instructional goals. Student interaction also needs to be structured so that the many benefits of peer-interactive approaches can come about (33-36)

Richards (1994) has pointed out that a considerable amount of time is used in the interaction process while learning a second language. Also, he has mentioned that “ a great deal of time in teaching is devoted both to interaction between the teacher and the learners, and to interaction among the learners themselves”(138). Teachers spend hours together to provide the students with the necessary input for them to be able to communicate using the foreign language.

Interaction can be described depending on the dominant type of interaction that is taking place in the English classroom. Thus, we need to consider the teacher-dominated, teacher- centered, and student- centered classrooms. The teacher dominated classroom is the one where the teachers spend most of the time talking, and the students' participation is very limited. The teacher – centered classroom is the one where the teacher is controlling the students' participation through some classroom activities and students have the chance to participate. Finally, the student – centered classroom is the one where the students can participate more actively. Besides, they can direct and develop the classroom activities by interacting among themselves.

### **The Significance and Implications of Classroom Interaction**

Classroom interaction is considered a productive teaching technique. According to Allright (1984), it is the process whereby classroom language learning is managed. In the language classroom, the process of negotiation involved in interaction is itself to be identified with the process of language learning.

In the classroom interaction, both teachers and students can create the learning opportunities, which motivate the students' interest and potential to communicate with others. Classroom interaction in the target language can now be seen as not just offering language practice, nor just learning opportunities, but as actually constructing the language development process itself.

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However, not all the forms of classroom interaction are equally productive for language development. For this reason, interaction must be seriously meaningful about matters of serious concern to the participants and therefore conducive to a serious attempt to communicate, not merely to simulate communication.

There are many patterns of classroom interaction, such as group work, closed-ended teacher questioning, individual work, choral responses collaboration, teacher initiates and student answers, full-class interaction, self-access and so on. Among these patterns, pair or group work is considered the most interactive way. It does not only pay attention to the sociocultural and personal experience that guide students' behavior in the classroom, but also have three value systems of choice, freedom and equality. Sullivan (2000) claims that what is embedded in the notion of pair work or group work is the idea of choice because students have a choice of partners or groups; and they have a right to talk freely and are also free from the teacher's control.

Interactive language teaching stresses the importance of providing learners with more activities to interact directly with the target language – to acquire it by using it rather than to learn it by studying it. It requires the teacher to step out of the limelight, to give a full role to the students in carrying out activities to accept all kinds of opinions, and to tolerate errors. On the other hand, the students are expected to listen to others (the teacher and other students) to talk with and to negotiate meaning in a shared context.

All the skills of language are equally taught and acquired to enable the learner to use language effectively. This method takes not only the cognitive and creative aspects of the learner into consideration but also considers his psychological and behavioural aspects. It aims at developing the intrinsic motivation of the students and makes a teacher motivating, stimulating and supervising rather than imposing and thrusting. The shift of emphasis is from teaching to learning with the learner as the focal point. The learner's affective state and his learning needs are adequately catered to. The emphasis shifts from focusing on the language (i.e correct grammar and structure) to the functions of language (i.e what it is used for).

The students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material. In interaction, students can use all what they possess of the language-all they have learned or casually absorbed-in real-life exchanges where expressing their real meaning is importance to them. They thus have experience in creating messages from what they hear, since comprehension is a process of creation (Rivers 1981:160-2). In a second language situation, interaction becomes essential to survival in the new language and culture.

### **Features of Interactive Language Learning**

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The important features of interactive language learning are:

- Meaning is paramount
- Language learning is learning to communicate
- Effective communication is sought
- Drilling may occur, but peripherally
- Attempt to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning
- Teachers help and motivate learners to work with the language
- Fluent and acceptable language is the primary goal
- Learners are expected to interact with people either in a pair and in a group work.

### **Role of Teachers**

The major role of the interactive teacher includes the roles of a facilitator, a manager, a resource, an independent participant, a researcher and a learner. As a facilitator, he makes the process of learning an easier task to help students' clear away road blocks and find shortcuts. As a manager, he plans lessons, organizes learning activities, gives feedback and structures classroom time. As a resource, he offers advices and counsel when students seek them. As a researcher and a learner, he makes an effort to find out how well students can learn and how much assistance is needed.

The teacher is the main agent of change and of prime importance in the teacher-centered approach. His roles are varied and manifold and his position in the whole educational system becomes indispensable. Part of the teacher's art is to create, or stimulate student creation of the types of situations in which interaction naturally blossoms and in which students can use what they have been learning in a more formal fashion.

### **Classroom Procedures**

Interaction, which is achieved in formal situations, is a matter of technique or of classroom approach, but when it is achieved in less formal situations, it involves imaginative planning with student input.

At first, the teacher needs to consider the age of the students, their scholastic background, their culturally absorbed ways of learning, and their objectives in studying the language without ignoring the political and social pressures that are largely determining their motivation. After taking these factors into account, the kind of course and presenting material that will meet the students need is to be decided.

The teachers should not look for the best method for teaching languages, but rather they should seek the most appropriate approach, design of materials or set of procedures in a particular case. Teachers need to be flexible with a repertoire of techniques. They can employ as circumstances dictate, while keeping interaction between teacher and student,

student and teacher, student and student, student and authors of texts and the student and the community that speaks the language.

### **Teacher-student Interaction**

In the pattern of teacher-student interaction, the teacher has a total control on who talks, when and about what is being talked. On one hand, the teacher-student interaction may have tightly controlled patterns of communication and on the other greater variability in the patterns of communication. The appropriateness of the pedagogical purpose of the lesson, the language proficiency of the students, and the frames of reference through which both teachers and students judge the appropriateness of their classroom behaviour are to be taken care of in the teacher-student interaction.

### **Student- student Interaction**

The recent shift toward more communicative approaches of second language teaching has prompted a shift in instructional styles; as a result more classroom time is allotted for students to actively communicate with one another. The student- student interaction in second language classrooms can create opportunities for students to participate in less structured and more spontaneous language use, negotiate meaning, self- select when to participate, control the topic of discussion, and most important, draw on their own prior knowledge and interactional competencies to actively communicate with others.

### **Student- text Interaction**

Reading experiences enable the students develop a control over the language. It helps them develop confidence in themselves. They read around words that they do not know and make use of the available information to comprehend the familiar words and identify their grammatical function.

### **Student- community Interaction**

Classrooms do not operate in isolation from society. The educational institutions tend not only to reflect but also to transmit the social and cultural values and beliefs of the dominant society in which they exist. Interacting with the community enables anyone to speak the language. The students get many opportunities when they are sent out into the community with a clearly defined project that involves talking with native speakers and finding out the required information.

### **Proceedings in the interactive classroom**

The proceedings in the interactive classroom are as follows:

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- In an interactive classroom, first of all, there is much listening to authentic materials. The listening is purposeful as students prepare themselves to use what they have heard of in some way.
- The students listen and begin to speak in reacting to pictures and objects, in role plays and in discussion.
- The students are made to watch films and video tapes of native speakers interacting. This enables the students to know the varieties of language, stress and intonation and acquire it through practice.
- The students improve their pronunciation not only through interaction but also in poetry reading, preparing dialogues, etc.
- Reading activities in the classroom may help to promote interaction through interpretation, expansion, and discussion.

### **The Interactive Discourse in the Language Classroom**

The foreign language is not only a tool for future encounters in the outside world but it is the instrument that creates and shapes the social meaning of the class itself. By entering a foreign- language classroom, students leave behind the social reality created by their native tongue and start constructing a new reality. Traditional forms of classroom interaction need to be reassessed in the light of the new language and help the learners broaden their discourse options in the classroom. This could be made possible through various classroom activities.

### **Promoting Interaction through Classroom Activities**

A wide range of activities have been proposed for use in the classroom. They are mostly problem- solving activities which include sharing of information, negotiation of meaning and interaction. The activities may include large- group activities, small- group activities, and pair work.

#### **Classroom activities**

The most workable classroom activities are presentations, pair work, discussions, debates and written exercises. All these activities need to be task-oriented; so that they can help nurture students' problem-solving and creative abilities and can give them experience in functioning in realistic discourse.

Well-organized interactions will make learners rack their brain, speak their mind, and share their views with others naturally. Thus words slip out or pour out desirably.

#### **Large-group activities**

Large group activity is a method of cooperative learning method. The group members are encouraged to contribute their personal opinions or knowledge of a particular issue, support those opinions and discuss differences of opinion within the group. The Large group activities may include:

- Group discussion on a particular topic
- Interpreting a story
- Group decoding of a text

### **Small -group Activities**

Small -group activities enable the students take a more active role in what they are learning, as well as, have more opportunities to contribute to and help formulate the information that is generated and learned. The small -group activities may include:

- Small-group discussions
- Debate

### **Pair-work**

In the pair-work activity, the individual performance of the student is highlighted. The students freely initiate their own ideas. The pair-work activity may include:

- Role-play
- Interpreting statements
- Finding key sentences

### **Interactive Computer- Assisted Language Learning**

The computer is essentially an interactive device. It is, therefore, a most appropriate aid for language learning that has interaction as its goal. Although not yet capable of carrying on a natural conversation with the user, the computer does have a responsive capacity that endows computer- assisted language learning (CALL) with certain advantages. The various types of CALL programs possess common characteristics related to interaction. Even a simple drill program enables the learners to achieve success. The student may transmit the message and receive an immediate feedback from the computer. If specific hours are identified, the students make a self-correction. By this, the students can achieve what they aim at.

### **Interactive language Teaching**

If the cultivation of Communicative skills in the target language is the goal of education, then interaction must be present in the classroom. Since real communication is interaction  
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between people and linguistic interaction is a collaborative activity, classroom teaching and learning activities must be interactive in nature. To promote interaction in another language, one must maintain a lively attention and active participation among the students.

In the attempt to improve classroom work mainly seeking ways and ideas for students' involvement, the researcher turned to interactive language teaching and tried out many of its principles.

In this sense, this study is a reflection of the successful application of the basic principles of interactive language teaching in the classroom. Communication is interaction between people who have something to share. If skillfully handled, interactive classroom techniques can promote learner initiative and autonomy, which in turn ensure successful language learning.

### **Need of the present study**

English is an important tool for the learners for career mobility and social advancement. But the courses offered for majority of learners at the undergraduate level do not lend themselves to immediate usefulness in terms of proficiency or job-related skills development. Therefore, the need of the time is to focus on the development of communication. English should be taught as a functional language, as a means of communication rather than as a dead language. The holders of the new jobs in the industry and commerce, scientists, engineers, and communicators in the service organizations, all need a type of practical ability in English language – in particular, an ability to talk in direct communication with their counterparts, covering both everyday discourse and the specialized usage of their own jobs.

A learner – oriented teaching method may enable the learner engage himself in creative and divergent thinking, problem solving, self-learning and explore new avenues of communication.

### **The study**

In an attempt to investigate the important question of how teaching/learning techniques relate to successful language learning, a small scale and relatively informal research project was undertaken in VHNSN College, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India. The selected samples are 37 in number from various departments: Tamil, English, Chemistry, Zoology, Computer Science, Physics, Economics, Commerce and History.

The Interactive method with all its encompassing and multidimensional nature in ELT is envisaged not only to develop the communicative capacity of the students but also to empower them with the capability 'to learn how to learn' and become self-directive in the

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long run. It is with these things in view that the researcher has attempted to make an in-depth assessment of teaching/learning of English at the college level; particularly the focus is on developing the interactive skill among the students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The study is tuned towards a small group of learners who are interested in pursuing a proper career for their life.

The main objective of this study is to motivate and inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship in young graduates. The primary aim of the course is to activate and enrich learner's English language and further improve their communicative competence to help them play their roles effectively in this competitive world where they will undertake their career.

## **Activity**

### **Interview Technique**

Interviewing is a natural interactive activity because it emphasizes group discussion and deliberation. The researchers have grouped the samples in teams of 5 to 6 members and asked them to develop a series of questions that could be used to interview a candidate for a specific job. The interview was then conducted in front of the class using selected samples.

This interview technique has enabled the learners hone their job interview skills and take them through the application process and offered tips on what to do and say during interviews and meeting with potential employers.

### **Question and Answer Technique**

Questioning is a humanistic exercise that focuses on the learners themselves, their attitudes, and values. The researchers have framed a series of disconnected questions which were graded in order of increasing difficulty, starting with short simple questions, and working up to long and complex sentences. The questions do not usually develop a conversation for they do not usually depend on each other in a meaningful way. Here, the learners were explicitly encouraged to keep speaking for the full amount of time. The researchers have set a range of possible questions such as:

- What is your name?
- How are you?
- How well can you speak English?
- What do you do?
- What is your brother's name?
- What is he doing?
- What do you like to do in your leisure time?
- What are your future plans?

- Have you ever been to Delhi/Bombay/Calcutta?
- When did you go there?
- What did you see there?
- Did you enjoy your visit? Why/Why not?
- Why do you want to learn English?

Asking and answering questions are the two basic functions necessary for the survival in a foreign language and it is considered to be a very general technique. In all the modules questioning activities have been used to find out the level of learners about their culture and surroundings and also ensure their active participation. The learners were asked to give a minimal standard of self-expression for the above questions.

### **Giving instructions/description/explanation**

This technique enables the learners to come out fluently with the description of a well known object, at some length. The researchers have chosen something that is familiar to everybody for it is a good way of getting the learner to produce connected discourse on a given topic. The choice of a widely known or easily comprehensible object for description would allow the learners with a considerable freedom of choice of expression without requiring extensive preparation. The learners have been given certain topics and asked to express themselves in short.

- Describe an elephant.
- Describe how you celebrate New Year.
- How do you cover your book?
- Explain how would you advise your brother to prepare for the public exam?

The learners are required to express themselves at some length at a minimum of six to eight sentences within the given preparation time of two minutes and then speak for three minutes. This technique has allowed the learners to display their own ability to explain things with extended opinions fluently.

### **Discussion Technique**

The discussion technique is a powerful teaching technique. Discussions help the students understand not only the material but also each other better and enable them build a more cohesive learning team among themselves. It allows students to clarify gaps in their knowledge. Learning becomes more effective when it is participative for discussions involve students more directly in interaction. The researchers have assigned a topic to the learners:

Women make better managers.

The learners have been given a controversial topic so as to invite them to explore areas that they want to probe more deeply. The main intention of the exercise is to get the learners to talk and to stimulate their interest and imagination. The discussion technique has made the learners think about their values and priorities.

### **Role- Play Technique**

The use of role-play makes language learning more student centered and interactive. It creates a more spontaneous and realistic learning environment that prepares the students for social interaction through the medium of a foreign language. Role plays may be enacted around every day situations as well as around topical problems. The learners are asked to take on a particular role and to imagine him/her in that role in a particular situation. Then they are given a set of instructions that would be expressed in terms of the general situation:

Imagine you are a tourist in Andhra and you want to visit Thirupathi. You are talking to a travel agent. Find out how to get there and get details about the places to visit, traveling time, lodging, price, comfort etc.

The simple role-play has enabled the learners to make a series of appropriate in one continuous role. It improves the learners' oral performance and trained them in all the four skills.

### **Role-Play between learners:**

Learners can also be paired together for a role-play. These learner-learner role-plays are usually of great fun. Learners tend to get very involved, with visibly greater spontaneity and creativity than in talking to teacher role plays. Each learner in a pair has been given a role that would match by his /her partner's role. The researchers have assigned certain matching roles for the learners such as:

- Policeman and robber arrested for robbery
- Doctor and patient with a problem
- Lawyer and client accused of bribery
- Teacher and student caught for copying
- Hotel receptionist and tourist

The researchers have specified the situations according to the learners', imagination and familiarity with the role played.

### **Observation**

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- The pair work and group activities made students socialize with each other. This created a positive atmosphere in the class.
- The activities like role play, and problem solving discussions have greatly contributed to the overall development of the students and enhance their personalities.
- Few students used their native languages from time to time, but it faded away as they became accustomed to the activities.
- With the activities and practice, interaction and imagination have increased among the students.
- The multi benefited techniques used by the researchers enabled the learners to easily and quickly assess as the students have really mastered the language. The use of various techniques and assessments drives interactivity bring several benefits to the students, by this they are revived from their passivity of merely listening to a lecture and instead they become attentive and engaged.
- The study ends on an optimistic note wherein it is believed that the implementation of the Interactive method is practical.

### **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to provide opportunities to interact in the classroom. This could be done through interactive learning activities that can provoke a very positive attitude towards language learning.
- Teachers should concentrate on performance assessment techniques such as group projects, oral presentations, constructed response questions, demonstrations and simulations that can be used to encourage students construct meaningful learning experiences while applying critical thinking skills.
- Time is an essential part of the learning process. The active participation of the students in the activities may use a lot of time; so the teachers need to reorganize the classroom activities to make a good use of time.
- The students must be persuaded to interact positively and effectively in the language classroom.
- Language teachers must make error corrections in a very careful way so that the students can feel comfortable at the remarks made by the teacher and not frustrated at the attempts to correct them in front of their friends.

### **Conclusion**

In a language class, many language teachers might have felt that they spent a considerable amount of time doing the talking and encouraging the students to participate rather than listening. Now, it is clearly understood that the students need English by and large to communicate their ideas in everyday situations and express themselves clearly and effectively. So, teachers need to be more conscious of the usefulness of applying

different teaching methodologies, techniques, and activities to promote students' active participation. The lecture mode of teaching will have to give way to interactive activities like group and pair works in order to help students exchange information to obtain comprehensible input while they are engaged in constructing meaningful experiences to achieve success.

A reflective teaching approach would give language teachers hints to overcome the everyday problematic situations which they deal within the classroom. Once teachers are conscious of the way they are carrying their teaching, they will be able to make the necessary turns to bring the ship back to shore.

Traditional forms of classroom interaction need to be reassessed in the light of the new language to help learners move from institutional productivity to productive conviviality. Only by broadening their discourse options in the classroom, and learners stop being foreign-language consumers and become the active architects of interpersonal and intercultural understanding. A sincere effort from our experts and the government can set the rails on the tracks and get it going. We all need to pool in our efforts to make the Interactive Method work in our situation and make our education more fruitful and rewarding.

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