

Discussion Skills in ELT Classroom



Literature

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ABSTRACT

English becomes a lingua franca in this era of globalization. All urban areas have already enhanced English language learning. Now-a-days rural students are also developing their language skills. The advent of professional English courses has changed the scenario of English teaching. English language laboratories introduce student centred language learning. This language laboratory is a platform for the rural students to improve their skills. Among all the skills discussion skills are indispensable. Most of the multi-national companies like WIPRO, INFOSYS, TECH MAHENDRA etc., are also coming to the Engineering Colleges in rural areas to recruit the students. Their major concentration is on discussion skills rather than writing skills. The rate of employability is based on the performance of the students. The involvement of the teacher makes the students learn the skills easily. Spontaneous discussions enhance student's motivation, intellectuality and democratic habits.

Introduction: English becomes a lingua franca in this era of globalization. All urban areas have already enhanced English language learning. Now-a-days rural students are also developing their language skills. The advent of professional English courses has changed the scenario of English teaching. English language laboratories introduce student centred language learning. This language laboratory is a platform for the rural students to improve their skills. Among all the skills discussion skills are indispensable.

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Objectives: Discussions Skills are introduced in the curriculum of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Kakinada (JNTUK). The objectives of introducing this to the students are improving their ability to speak, a very good command over the topic or the subject, in depth understanding of the subject area, grip over the language, easily interacting with others, exposing their interpersonal skills, clarity of thought and speech, thinking critically and crucially, decision making skills individually and in group, leadership qualities, a way to change their attitude, listening skills, team work etc.

Features of Discussion skills: Teacher organizes the intake of 60 students into some smaller groups for achieving instructional objectives. Schmuck and Schmuck say: "a collection of interacting persons with some degree of reciprocal influence over one another." In these discussions students learn not only from their teacher but also from the other participants in the interaction. Everyone in the group interpret the subject matter in his\her own way. Next part of these features is interpersonal skills. If the students are participating in the discussions number of times they can be perfect in performing their interpersonal skills. Among all these interpersonal skills active listening, speaking and non-verbal communication take progressive strides.

Types of Discussion skills: There are different types of discussion skills. They are brainstorming, role play, group discussion, debate, seminar and workshop.

Teacher's modus operandi: In these discussion skills teacher acts as a facilitator otherwise there will be the rise of criticism and evaluation by the students. Facilitator encourages each and every participant in any type of discussion. Time limit plays a key role. Teacher creates the amiability among all the participants. Teacher's selection of the topic is quiet useful to the stu-

dents to give the feedback. At the end teacher's role is to thank, summarize and grant the positive comments.

Brainstorming: A group of similar people sit together to generate their ideas and solve their problems. While a person is speaking all the others are listening. If they listen well they can think seriously and critically. There is a place for explosion of ideas. Complete group's knowledge and experience is taken into consideration. Typical problem solving and decision making will work very effectively with this type of discussions.

Group Discussions: A group of people sit around a table to discuss a topic which is given by their teacher. Eight to ten participants are involved. These discussions may be formal or informal. For all the participants some time will be given to think and to take notes. The idea of this type of discussion is to reach group consensus or decision making or solving a problem at the end. All the participants in the group consciously or unconsciously play the roles of an initiator, moderator, note taker, rapport builder etc. Keen observation of teacher will avoid conflicts and collisions among the participants.

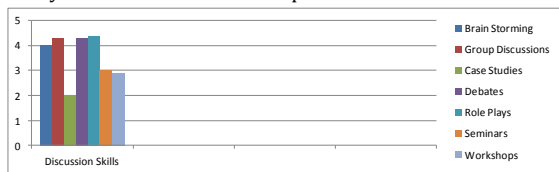
Role play: This is a dramatic way of enacting a situation. Roles will be announced prior to attend the discussion. If the roles and situations are nearer to reality, participants will be very enthusiastic. Teacher should provide the opportunity to imagine the given roles. While the role play is going on the involvement of the teacher is not at all effective. Feedback and observations encourage the participants. In time practice and consented to think from the point of view of the roles are progressive.

Case study: Case study is similar to group discussion. All the participants are given a case study on a sheet of paper and some time is given to them to think and take notes. Each participant is given in a group two minutes time to speak. Anybody among the group members can start speaking about the topic. So no interaction takes place among the participants. Problem solving skills, analytical ability, creativity and insight are tested through these discussion skills. There is no scope for interpersonal skills.

Debate: Two persons can speak about the topic. One speaks about for and the other participant speaks about against. They stick to the same side till the end of the topic. They can extend their ideas based on the stipulated time. Sometimes this debating is also for decision making. The result of the debate depends upon consensus.

Seminar: A small group of students and a teacher discuss a particular topic. The topic is announced days before. It is not at all an extempore. Audience pose the questions after completion of the seminar. Interactive session takes place. The idea behind this seminar system is to make the students know about the methodology of the subject area they have chosen to discuss.

Workshop: A group of people gather at a place for a discussion and practical work on a particular subject. All the participants share their knowledge and experience. Every participant can clarify their doubts about the topic.



Usually students are very much interested in participating discussions skills like Brain Storming, Group Discussions and Debate rather than any other activities in English Language Labs. Most of the students like to participate in Brain Storming, Group Discussions, Debates and Role Plays with very much enthusiasm rather than the Case Studies, Seminars and Workshops. Eventually these are the most important activities for their job market or placements in engineering colleges. Participation of the students is shown in the above graphical representation in all the discussion skills.

Observations: Teacher’s observation is playing a pivotal role in the classroom. The mentalities, attitudes and mind sets of the students are not identical. Each and every step of the teacher is crucial in managing the number of students. Students need to develop some essential strategies in handling the discussions fruitfully and successfully. They are: examining, resources, active listening, preparation, practice, contribution, use of formal language etc. In the process student’s background knowledge is taken into consideration when they are divided into groups.

Examining –Before participate in the discussion student needs to understand the subject matter, how he/she has to enter the discussion, discussion etiquette, how to agree and disagree, polite expressions to handle the others, how to understand the gestures made by others in the group.

Resources- Adequate material for preparation is also the responsibility of the teacher. Different articles from the magazines like India Today, Outlook etc. Books like Scientific America, Reader’s Digest will increase students’ interest towards discussions in the classrooms.

Active Listening- For participating in the discussion one cannot be the intelligent but possess very good listening skills. Without having any idea on the given topic if they listen carefully they can be able to contribute well based on their basic knowledge. Being an extrovert in discussion is an added benefit.

Preparation- There is a formula i.e. preparation + practice = effective presentation. Without preparation one cannot win in any discussion\presentation. Understanding the given topic prior to attend the discussion is very important. Content based preparation is useful for discussions.

Practice- There is an old proverb i.e. Practice makes man perfect. It is really believable that one cannot be the master in handling the topics of discussion. So the habit of participating in informal discussions at home or with friends leads to the formal discussions in the classroom environment. Asking for opinions and adding opinions to the discussion will give a bear fruit.

Contribution- Preparation and practise give the confidence in participating either in the discussion or in the personal presentation. In depth knowledge about the topic furnish many a reward. Regular practice and gradual contribution offer a good result. Listening to others make develop in participate and prevail the discussion.

Use of Formal Language- Learn certain expressions to participate in the discussion. No place is given to informal words and expressions. Right expression at the right context offers good marks. By observing two or three discussions students can gather useful expressions. Real time applications with formal language are always acceptable.

Feedback: Teacher’s feedback is invaluable to the students. They always wait for the approval and positive reinforcement from the teacher. Students those who have participated well will be recognized and encouraged. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from the teacher can make them participate enthusiastically in the classroom discussions. Students easily get command over discussions when they understand the depth of the different kinds of discussions.

Conclusion:
Classroom discussions become useful avenues for practicing and learning language. Employers always contemplate on candidates who are adaptable and flexible. Facilitator must prepare the students to participate in classroom discussion by describing, modelling, and providing opportunities for them to practise classroom discussion skills. Today’s job market is challenging to the students of engineering colleges in rural areas. Students need to enhance not only the subject matter but also effective communication skills. In-depth knowledge on subject matter brings confidence and enthusiasm to participate in discussion skills. At last students have to understand that they are selling their potential in the job market.

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