



**The Effect of Reading-Based Activities in Enhancing Vocabulary-An
Observational Study by V Rajasekaran**

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of reading-based activities to improve lexical stock of engineering students. Four reading based activities were introduced aiming at improving students lexical skills and the researchers' observations were recorded in this paper. The study was carried out at the rural-based engineering college in Tamilnadu, India in the academic year 2013-2014.



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1. Introduction

‘Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.’

- Benjamin Franklin.

This is what the expectations of our present Gen Y students. English teachers are forced to find alternatives to lecture method to achieve real success in the language classrooms. Switching to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) will serve the Gen Y students expectation, and it is undoubtedly true that, carefully chosen tasks are wonderful teaching aid to maximize students’ participation and learning in any language classroom. According to Feez (1998:17) ‘Learners learn a language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities’. The researcher presents how he has introduced the tasks in the language classroom and analyses the effect of tasks in vocabulary enhancement of students. There were four reading-based activities used for the present study.

2. Objectives of the study

The prime objective of the work was to record the impact of activities in vocabulary enhancement at tertiary level, and the next objective was to understand the natural motivation of the students in the activity-based classes.

3. Methodology

Study was conducted in Erode Builders Engineering College, Kangeyam, Tiruppr DT of Tamilnadu in the year 2013-2014. Sixty II year Engineering students were participated in the study.

4. Activities

The following activities have been conducted.

Activity 1: Read the Letter to the Editor Column of English Newspaper

Activity 2: Read the Newspaper Article –Spirit of Entrepreneurship from Times of India

Activity 3: Read a Short Story



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Activity 4: Book Review

Mihwa Chung (2009) in her article “The Newspaper Word List: A Specialised Vocabulary for Reading Newspapers” says that reading is one of the most common and significant ways of learning another language, for which newspaper is the important reading material. Newspapers are often used in reading classes in order to develop reading skills and develop vocabulary knowledge (Hwang & Nation, 1989; Klinmanee & Sopprasong, 1997). There are several reasons for this. Firstly, newspapers are easily and cheaply available in hard copy or online. Secondly, newspapers are authentic materials that are commonly read by all. Thirdly, they provide a wide choice of interesting topics from which teachers or learners can choose reading texts. Finally, reading newspapers is considered to be not only a good way of reviewing old vocabulary learned but also of learning new vocabulary from context (Hwang & Nation, 1989).

Newspaper is one of the widely used materials to learn and teach English language. It presents the contemporary use of language. Therefore, it can be exploited in many ways to improve students’ communication skills especially vocabulary. According to Hwang’s study (1989) involving the analysis of 80 newspaper articles (a total of 26722 running words), out of 80% of the words in newspaper, about 10% are proper nouns. This means that if learners know the most frequent 2000 words and all proper nouns, they will reach about 90% coverage of newspaper texts. It endorses that newspaper can be used in the classroom for even the students of very basic level. Therefore, researcher has made use of newspaper-based reading activities.

Activity 1. Read the Letter to the Editor Column of English Newspaper

- Purpose of the Activity** : Enabling students to acquire contemporary words
- Time** : 90 minutes
- Preparation** : Collecting ‘Letters to the Editor’ from any English Newspaper



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Teachers' Role : Teacher may analyze one sample letter before assigning activity to them

Learners' Role : Active Participation and effort to find out more words

Procedure

Students have been directed to bring the newspaper cutting of 'letters to the editor' from any of English newspapers, and they have been asked to note down the unknown words and to refer the dictionary for meaning. They have been asked to read out the new words in the class with meaning and using in the context sentence.

Observations

This activity has helped them to acquire more words, especially contemporary words and put them into practice immediately. Students have actively participated in the activity. Some students have found almost all the words new to them, whereas some students have not understood the context of the letter since they were not aware of the original issue that the letter was addressed. Contextual ignorance impeded students' understanding and handicapped them to guess, and without contextual understanding, guessing from the context is not possible. In that sense, it might not have been useful to some students, but majority were on the positive side.

Activity 2: Read the Newspaper Article –Spirit of Entrepreneurship

Purpose of the Activity : Making students to acquire business vocabulary

Time : 2 hrs

Preparation : Collecting the article 'Spirit of Entrepreneurship' from Times of India

Teachers' Role : Briefing how to read the article and what are the words and points they are supposed to take down



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Learners' Role : Selecting the interesting article and doing multiple reading to grasp more words

Procedure

Students have been asked to bring the newspaper article 'Spirit of Entrepreneurship' from Times of India newspaper and asked to read the article aloud in the class for first reading. In the second reading, students have been asked to identify the unknown words. Afterwards, they have been asked to identify the meaning of unknown words using dictionary before they write the summary of the article and read in the class. All the new words from the article have to be presented with synonyms and antonyms as a subsequent activity. This activity has promoted reading since the entire article is about successful entrepreneurs. Students have got lots of new words from the article to use in their day to day life.

Observation

This activity has really captivated students especially, those who want to become entrepreneur, as the article is about entrepreneurship. It has really motivated the students very well because all the articles talked about successful entrepreneurs and their success story in the industry. It has taught lots of life skills, which is worth knowing, and some of the article have opened a new platform for job opportunities too. It also has assisted the students to prepare them for their placements also. Students have acquired more business vocabulary in this activity.

Activity 3: Read a Short Story

Stories have many connections with our life. The initial learning of children starts from stories as everything is taught to them in the form of stories. Short stories are simple, effective and easily accessible resource that can be used in English classroom to teach language as well as to open up their creative domain which will make their language learning more interesting. As it serves as a part and parcel of life, researcher has used short-story based activity also.

Purpose of the Activity : Making students to acquire literary words



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- Time** : 2 hrs
- Preparation** : Learners have to collect three short stories
- Teachers' Role** : Suggesting students how to read short stories
- Learners' Role** : Selecting the interesting short story and doing multiple reading to grasp more words

Procedure

Students have been asked to read a short story of their interest from the selected three stories and then have been asked to prepare a wordlist from the story that has to be presented in the class the next day.

Observation

Students have been introduced to various short stories through this activity. It has initiated the habit of reading books among students. Most of the students said that it was the first time they were reading general books. It has sparked the pleasure of reading habit among the students and they have started reading many stories for pleasure. It has provided more words to use in everyday communication and has laid a platform to read general books and novels in the next level.

Activity 4: Book Review

The habit of reading book is radically deteriorating among the present generation students. Involving students in reading books will certainly help them to develop their general reading habit; it may in turn result in good improvement in their language learning. Hence, an attempt was made to use book review activity.

Purpose of the Activity : Making students to acquire analytical vocabulary

Time : 2 hrs

Preparation : Collecting a general book



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Teachers' Role : Suggesting students about methodologies of reviewing a book

Learners' Role : Selecting the interesting book and doing reading to grasp more words and ideas to write a book review

Procedure

Students have been asked to read a book of their own interest and have been asked to prepare a review about the book. The review of the book is to be presented in the classroom.

Observation

Students were unable to complete the reading of a book at the given duration due to poor reading habit. They have consumed longer time to complete the book. It was quite shocking to note that many students were unable to complete this activity due to their lack of reading skills. They found it quite challenging compared to all other activities.

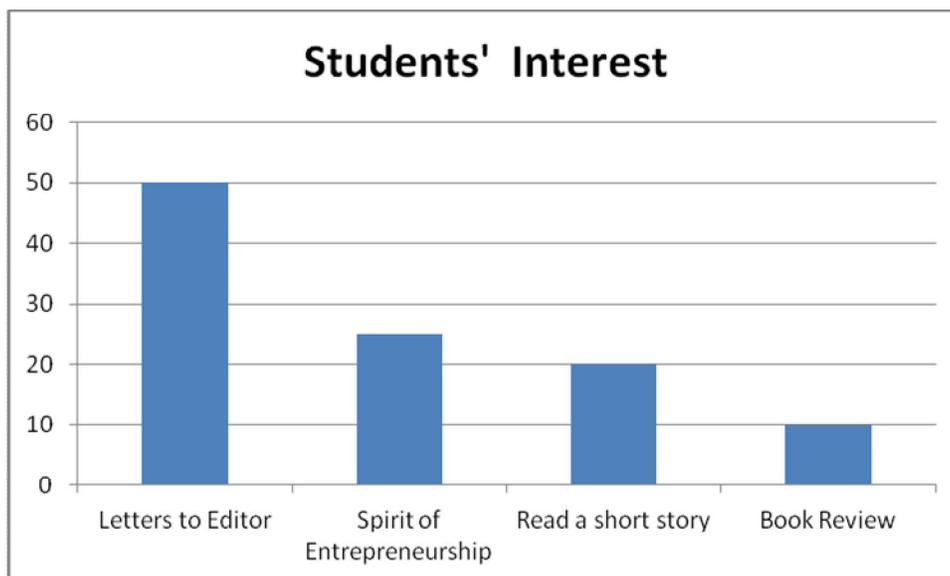
5. Analysis

Students Rating of the Activities

Activity	The number of Students Like (Out of 60)
Letters to the Editor	50
Spirit of Entrepreneurship	25
Read a short story	20
Book Review	10



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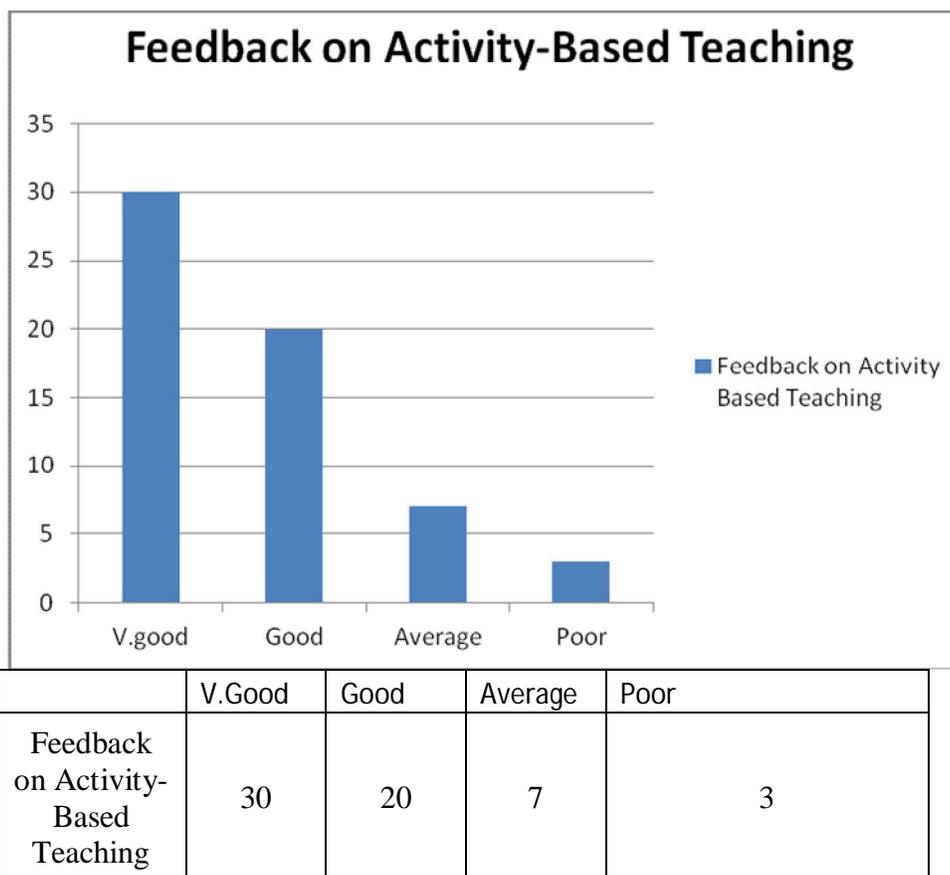


The above details present that 'Letters to the editor' activity is topped and book review is in the bottom line. It is because letters to the editor is a small piece of writing, and students can complete their reading quickly, whereas all other activities demanded more time, and it could have been the reason for their liking. Both 'The spirit of entrepreneurship' and 'Read a short story' claim to be on the same line as they require almost same reading time. The book review activity is least received by the students because most of the rural students do not have the general reading habit so this activity could have posed a great challenge to them. As result of poor reading habit, they least liked the book review activity.



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5. Findings



In general, students were very eager to participate in all the activities since it had provided practical learning. Overall, students were very positive in their feedback, and they said that they had liked all the activities and had shown considerable improvement in their vocabulary stock. One student reported that he had started using lot of new words in his regular day-to-day affair. All the students registered their interest to have more activity-based classes to enhance their vocabulary skills. They were very happy to expose themselves in all sorts of activities, and they realized gradual improvement in their vocabulary stock. Some students felt that though it had not completely helped them to develop their vocabulary, to some



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extend all these activities had helped them to improve their vocabulary. It is understood from the study that rural engineering students have shown good interest in activity-based classes and it has created very positive impact on their vocabulary learning.

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