

## **The Importance of Classroom Activities on Teaching English**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to investigate the use of classroom activities in teaching English

as a foreign language for Libyan students in secondary schools. It is also aims to attract

the teachers` attention towards the importance of using adequate teaching activities which

may facilitate teaching and learning English in our schools. This research is concerned

with some practical activities that can be used in teaching English as a foreign language

by suggesting some teaching techniques regarding classroom activities.

### **Introduction**

classroom activities are concerned as one of the techniques that used in teaching

language and learning processes. The use of these activities in teaching English as a

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foreign language in order to enhance the students` awareness and motivation. In other words, classroom activities help to create an environment and a chance in which the acquisition of English language may be based on. The use of activities may also reduce students` underachievement in learning English by helping them to express themselves freely in the target language at different ways and situations. The necessity of using a variety of activities such as: songs, games, drama and role-play with the use of audio-visual aids certainly would help increasing students` knowledge of English. Moreover, the use of interesting classroom activities can encourage students to practise their English in a creative atmosphere and gain confidence.

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Teaching through classroom activities also would help teachers to create some sort of interest within the class and make their job more effective. The teachers can also monitor students` strengths and weaknesses.

**The Concept of Classroom Activities:**

Many authors have discussed classroom activities and their beneficial support to

language teaching. Some writers described classroom activities as following:

**Thomas and Leguike (1991)** claimed that during recent years there have been many

publications offering such activities to teachers. A variety of names have been attributed

to these activities such as: **language games, songs, drama, events, simulation,**

**awareness** and **fluency activities**. These activities are usually regarded as humanistic

techniques and methods and they follow a certain system of experiences which enhance

awareness fluency.(P: 33)

**Ur (1996 P:20)** has described the activity “through which language skills and

knowledge are consolidated and thoroughly mastered.” Each kind of activity has its own

beneficial role to play in the development of both fluency and clarity of understanding in

the use of the foreign languages. Classroom activities undoubtedly cater for the needs of

teaching and learning process in the secondary schools. Therefore, the researcher

conducts a paper on the various ways that can be used in using classroom activities.

**The Importance of Classroom Activities:**

Classroom activities play a very important role in learning and teaching English

language. Thus, the issue of classroom activities has been discussed by a number of

applied linguists and writers. They provide important elements to classroom learning in

order to develop the learner's ability to acquire the target language. The following are

some point of views of some researchers:

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**Little wood (1981)** stated that using classroom activities gives a chance for

positive personal relationships to develop among learners. "these relationships can be

used to 'activate' the classroom and to create an environment that supports the

individual in his efforts to learn." (P: 17)

**Philips (1999)** emphasized that using drama and drama activities has a clear

advantage for language learning. "It encourages learners to speak and gives them the

chance to communicate, even with limited language, using non-verbal communication,

such as body movements and facial expressions.” (P: 6)

**Johnson and Morrow (1989)** claim that the role-play and simulation are suitable

ways to be used in classrooms. They can offer a target for conversation and give learners

a chance to talk meaningfully to other learners. Moreover, the authors believe that all the

role-play activities have a principle of freedom of choice for the students. These students

are free to select the vocabulary or to develop the character or the situation as they wish.

(P: 126)

**Ur (1988 P:20)** stated that activities are important in classroom because they

motivate the students. “The function of the task is simply to activate the learners in such a

way as to get them to engage with material to be practised.” Also he claimed that it is

easier to concentrate on thinking about something if one can see that something.

“Learners who are asked to discuss or listen to something without any visual focus find

their attention wandering.”

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**Cook. G. (2000 P: 95)** claims that classroom activities provide the students with

the suitable environment of leaning and give a chance to participate in the classroom and

so, they achieve the best learning results. He stated that using of classroom activities

helps to build the student's self-confidence which helps him/her to interact effectively

and to feel responsible towards learning the target language.

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#### **Principles of Teaching Activities:**

**Krashen and Terrell (1983 P: 97)** stated four principles of learning and teaching

activities in classroom. The first one indicates that comprehension precedes production

i.e, listening comprehension precedes speaking or writing abilities in learning the

language. The second one indicates that students learn in stages, therefore, students are

not asked to speak before they get enough input. The third principle emphasized that

students should learn to communicate not to speak with grammatical accuracy in early

stages of learning. The final principle that activities focus on purpose rather than

grammar practice. The purpose of the learning is to use the language and have the ability

to communicate with others. There is no use of memorizing structures without using them

in communication. Students focus on topics which are known to them. Thus, the topics

are interesting, meaningful and giving meaning to the subject matter rather than the form.

#### **Types of Classroom Activities:**

**Thomas** and **Leguiké (1991)** distinguish the three main types of classroom tasks:

##### **1– Re–Communicative Tasks:**

The aim of these tasks as Thomas and Leguiké mentioned is to help students to deal

with various kinds of information primarily in a text form. Students in these activities

participate in directed exercises which help them express their own ideas and intentions.

This aim can be maintained inside the classroom through performing important

interaction of language use in the real world.(P: 30)

##### **2– Language Learning Tasks:**

These are controlled activities aim to ameliorate language skills in various aspects

such as: grammar, phonology, lexis and semantics. They provide a comprehensible development in the learning process. These activities can be used at many stages of the learning process.(P:34)

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### **3- Communicative Tasks:**

These start and shape exploratory tasks, where conversation appears from actual communicative demand, seek to represent linguistics forms and improve the personal skills. They concentrate on original communicative skills and help in better interaction.

**Little wood (1981 P: 20)** stated that the main purpose of using activities in teaching is to

assist students to communicate meanings effectively and prepare them for

communication. He also differentiated between two main types of activities: functional

communicative activities and social interaction activities.

### **1- Functional Communicative activities:**

Communicative activities can be organized in order to put emphasis on the functional

aspects of communication. These activities include problem solving and exchange of

information. The main purpose of this activity is that learners should use the language

in order to get meanings across as emphasis on being functionally effective.

## **2- Social Interaction activities:**

The social dimension of the skill is as significant as the functional side of

communication. Students should express in a manner that conveys the intended meaning

adequately and properly, but should also concentrate on the social context in which the

expression is being made.

**Jonson** and **Morrow (1981 P:131)** stated that “Drama” is a convenient umbrella

term for activities which involve an element of “let’s pretend.” These can include: **role-**

**play, simulation, songs, pictures, events** and **games**. For this purpose, “Drama” can be

said to cover all those activities in which students play themselves in an imaginary

situation or play an imaginary person in an imaginary situation. In order to understand

how this can benefit the learner, one should consider what happens when two or more

people are involved in verbal interaction.

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Thus, the activities in the classroom must focus on interesting topics which encourage

students to express their ideas and feelings without anxiety. In addition, **Holliday (1994**

**P: 131)** stated that the term drama can be explained as activities that need acting among learners.

**Harrap (1984)** explains that pictures make a strong visual influence on students and

increase a lot of valuable work. Using pictures helps to create spontaneous response and

lively action than when oral work is based on the written work only.(P: 13)

**Using of Classroom Activities:**

The main goal of using classroom activities is to develop the ability of the students to

think in the foreign language. In that, students learn the foreign language in the way they

acquire their mother tongue.

**Motawa and Alkilani (1989 P:17)** stated that “ The new material is presented orally.

Thus, words and patterns are taught with direct association with actions, dialogues,

situations, objects or pictures.”

They also suggested that when the exercises are classroom oriented and not related to real

life situations they become ineffective. The language is used for the classroom purpose

and does not expose the learner to the real world.

**Richards** and **Rodgers (1986)** claimed that the main focus is on repetition,

memorization, correct pronunciation, stress rhythm and intonation.

Different drills are

selected and later emphasized.

**Krashen** and **Terrell (1983 P: 20)** suggested that using of diverse types of activities

in the class and not to focus on the students` errors in order to help them acquire

sufficient knowledge and build self-confidence.

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**Frank** and **Rinvoluceri (1979 P:76)** stated that classroom activities help to complete

tasks which include co-ordination of parting information. It is therefore, important to

concentrate on what students do with language not what they know about it.

### **Suggested Teaching Activities:**

Teaching a foreign language can be more enjoyable and relaxing, if appropriate

activities are introduced in the daily classroom lessons. Using activities gives the teacher

the opportunity to help the students acquire new forms in an easy way. They can be

used to teach, practice and review new vocabulary, Also, they can be used to practice

grammatical structures and listening comprehension. We can also do writing activities

and do free speaking practice such as problem solving activities, role-play or discussion.

Therefore, the researcher would suggest **five** useful activities, that can be applied in the

classroom; hopefully, these will lead to effective language learning.

The following are

some examples of activities:

**1- Vocabulary Building or Review:**

Activity: "Find 10 differences"

Language focus: descriptive adjectives, nouns, and comparatives.

Skills practised: writing description or comparison.

Time: 10 minutes.

Material: A set of two pictures that show similar people. One set is needed for a pair of

students. Students are shown a sample set and asked if the pictures are similar, and how

they are different. This activity can be turned into a competition. The first pair that finds ten differences is the winner.

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**2- Guided practice:**

Activity: "How do they feel?"

Language focus: adjectives describing feeling and actions.

Skills practised: describing feelings.

Time: 10 minutes.

Material: pictures of faces for people expressing different feelings and moods.

**Instructions:**

- These adjectives can be taught or revised describing moods and feelings: happy, sad, angry...etc
- Students are asked to describe how people feel, why they feel that way and what made them feel this way.
- Students can present their description to the group, and their classmates and add additional information about the person in the picture.

**3- Grammar:**

Language focus: practice present simple tense.

Material: pictures of locations, city, streets and houses.

**Instructions:**

– Students are asked about the place where it is, what people normally do there. Also

vocabulary/words related to the location can be used. Students are asked to answer where

they live using present simple.

**4- Listening comprehension:**

Activity: “Dictate the picture”

Language focus: there is, there are, presentations.

Skills practised: listening comprehension.

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: pictures, or photocopies of picture. There should be one or a copy for each pair

of students.

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**5- Writing:**

Activity: “Text balloons”

Language focus: to elicit use of a specific structure, e.g two of models ‘will and shall’

Material: two or more pictures that show two or three people talking.

Text balloons

(clouds) to be used for writing one or two sentences.

**Instructions:**

– A picture of two people talk to each other is shown. Students are asked about the

situation and what they think these people are saying.

– Photocopies are handed out to students and asked to write in text balloons.

– Each pair reads their dialogue and then exchange it with other pair to read what the others wrote and comment on the dialogues.

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the importance of using classroom

activities in teaching English as a foreign language for secondary school students in

Libya. Despite the importance of the activities in promoting learning the foreign

language, they are rarely used in the classes. Although classroom activities consume time

and effort, they increase the quality of teaching and provide good learning situations.

Students are merely accustomed to receive instruction from the teachers and respond

accordingly in the classroom and the best way of teaching a foreign language is by using

a variety of activities because students can benefit from exchange information.

Teachers make sure that all the students can benefit from these activities and they are

distributed to students' achievement. In other words, classroom activities provide opportunities for disruptive students to misbehave fallacy and give these students direct responsibility and make them feel they matter. Thus, the students lack enough time and adequate activities to practise the language inside the classroom. Hence, in order for the classroom activities to be effective and applicable the optimum number of students in a class should be 20-25 learners.

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