CHAPTER-FOUR

Classroom Interaction

and

Classroom Activities
The contents of the book should facilitate teaching and learning. The textbook should be adapted in line with the needs of the students so that they may find its contents more interesting as contrary to the present textbook (NECI) in Iraq. Owing to the lack of interest in and poor in quality of contents there has been little improvement in the English language skills of Iraqi students over the years. The students need course material in the field of general English. The course material must be interesting for students. It should incorporate variety in material, integrate the four skills, tasks and activities in the form of an illustrated course-book. Students should participate actively in learning activities and language use. English classes should be full of activities—role play, games, projects, pair/group work, instead of only teaching and students only listening. As student’s preference is for the kind of classroom interaction which involves a lot of activities, where students are involved in tasks, where teacher relinquishes his control. Activities in which language is used for executing meaningful tasks promote learning. Tasks are important as they provide a purpose for activities. The implication for the classroom practice is that everything done in the classroom involves some kind of communication leading to the use of language. This can be realized by involving students in activities and problem-solving tasks.
The aim of syllabus or course of study in English as a second or foreign language ought to be, and often is, to make students proficient in communication skills by activities. While the existing English syllabus in the Iraqi secondary schools level English is taught like other subjects and not as a language to develop linguistic skills and to develop creative thinking. There is lack of functional communicative activities and social interaction activities, which help students in using language in various social situations. In the existing English syllabus speaking skills has almost no place and vocabulary is presented in the form of isolated items.

In view of these considerations the researcher urges that classroom activities and tasks must be introduced in the English syllabus of the Iraqi secondary school. Below is a brief account of both the concept and practice of classroom activities.
4.1 Classroom and Classroom Interaction

To study and describe what happens in the classroom, to know classroom teaching and learning and what goes on in a language classroom, we have to gain knowledge about the classroom, classroom interaction, task and activity. Amy B.M. Tsui defines classroom thus:

The classroom can be defined as a place where more than two people gather together for the purpose of learning, with one having the role of teacher. The teacher has certain perceptions about his or her role in the classroom.¹

Teaching is an interactive act. In the classroom, communication between the teacher and pupils goes on constantly as initiatory or responsive acts. This communication is called “interaction”.

Jack C. Richards, John Platt and Heidi Platt, (1992) define classroom interaction in these words:

The patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication and the types of social relationships which occur within classrooms. The study of classroom interaction may be a part of studies of Classroom Discourse, Teacher Talk and Second Language Acquisition.²
Chapter Four

Classroom Interaction and Classroom Activities

Classroom learning is a co-operative effort between the teacher and the students. It points to how the teacher and the students interact and how students interact amongst themselves, all of which affects language learning.

The teacher initiates interactions with the whole group of students and with individuals, right from the beginning of a language course. Initially the students can only respond non-verbally or with a few target language words they have practised. Later on, the students have more control of the target language and can respond more appropriately and even initiate interaction themselves.

What happens in a productive class hour is described by M.L. Tickoo (2009) under the following heads:

1. The teacher interacts with the whole class.
2. The teacher interacts with a group, a pair or an individual pupil.
3. Pupils interact with each other: in groups, in pairs, as individuals or as a class.
4. Pupils work with materials or aids and attempt the task once again individually, in groups and so on.³
The teacher sometimes interacts with the class as a whole while at other times with sub-groups in the classroom.

The teacher should introduce variations in the interactions pattern. Some of these are listed by Saket Raman Tiwari below: 4
Studies of the classroom, both primary and secondary, have shown that the language used by the teacher affects the language produced by the learners, the interaction generated and hence the kind of learning that takes place. Classroom language and interaction are even more important because language is the subject of study as well as the medium for learning. When students listen to the teacher’s instructions and explanations, when they express their views, answer questions and carry out tasks and activities, they are not only learning about the language but also putting to use the language that they are learning.

4.2 ASPECTS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

The dominant pattern of interaction is that of the teacher’s question, the student’s response and the teacher’s feedback. This is commonly found in all classrooms and is typical of classroom exchange. Teacher’s talk not only takes up the largest portion of talk but also determines the topic of talk and who talks. It is therefore a very important component of classroom interaction.

Amy B.M. Tsui defines teacher’s explanation, which is another component that takes up a significant portion of teacher’s talk:

There are different ways of defining explanation. Some define it very generally as providing information or communicating
content, others make a distinction between explanation of procedures and explanation of concepts, vocabulary and grammatical rules. How teachers deal with explanation is very important: inappropriate explanation or over-explanation hinder rather than help students to comprehend.\(^5\)

The ways in which students behave and interact during a classroom organized and controlled by the teacher (or sometimes by the learners themselves) to enable teaching to take place most effectively is called classroom management. It also includes procedures for grouping students.

For different types of classroom activities, the use of lesson plans, handling of equipment, aids, etc., and the direction and management of students behaviour and activity are helpful.

### 4.3.1 CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

#### 4.3.1. The Task

The task is an activity which is designed to help to achieve a particular learning goal:
The function of the task is to simply activate the learners in such a way as to get them to engage with the material to be practised.6

A number of dimensions of tasks influence their use in language teaching. These include:

Goal - the kind of goals teachers and learners identify for a task.

Procedures- the operations or procedures learners use to complete a task.

Order - the location of a task within a sequence of other tasks.

Pacing - the amount of time that is spent on a task.

Product - the outcome or outcomes students produce, such as a set of questions, an essay, or a summary as the outcome of a reading task.

Learning strategy - the kind of strategy a student uses when completing a task.

Assessment - how success in the task will be determined.

Participation - whether the task is completed individually, with a partner, or with a group of other learners.
Resources - the materials and other resources used with a task.

Language - the language learners use in completing a task (e.g. the mother tongue or English, or the particular vocabulary, structures or functions the task requires the learners to use.\textsuperscript{7}

The concept of task is central to many theories of classroom teaching and learning and the school curriculum is sometimes described as a collection of tasks.

4.3.1 (a) Clear objective

The use of task in language teaching provides a purpose for a classroom activity, which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake:

The task objective may be language-based, in which case it may be generally defined as getting the language right. However, the objective “getting the language right” on its own often leads to the composition, if rather boring, meaningless language-manipulation tasks, such as putting a series of sentences into the past tense.\textsuperscript{8}
4.4. Active Language Use

Activities are the ways of language practising which are used more:

We should make sure that the activity is in fact based mainly on using language. This may sound obvious, but it is surprising how many otherwise excellent language-practice tasks fall into this trap. It is tempting to think that if students, particularly children are happily absorbed in doing a task in an English lesson, they are therefore learning English—but it is not always so. They may, of course, be achieving other equally-or more-important educational objectives, for the sake of which we may opt temporarily, to sacrifice language-learning efficiency. 9

4.4.1 Learner Activation

The activities should be designed to concentrate on the students’ needs. These activities should also include and involve several subjects and different skills.

A well-designed grammar or language skill exercise practice actively, then should be based on a task that has clear objectives and entails the active use to the structure being
practiced, and it should maintain learner
interest and motivation through careful choice
of topic, use of information-gap procedures,
role-play, personalization, etc.\textsuperscript{10}

Activities is a loose term used to give a general description of what will happen in
a class. It is important to realise that we are not concerned here much about items
of language; we are talking about what, generally and physically, the students are
going to do:

A game is an activity; so is a simulation. The
introduction of new language is an activity; so
is parallel writing or story reconstruction.
Listening is an activity and so is an information
gap task; social talk is an activity so is an oral
composition. An activity is what the teacher
thinks of when he is asked, “What are you
going to do in class today?”\textsuperscript{11}

The activities that involve real communication promote learning and the activities
in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning and
the language that is meaningful for the learner to promote learning.

There are many activities, which are used in the classroom. Littlewood summaries
them under the following headings:
Whole task practice: It is often useful to distinguish between (a) training in the part-skills which the performance is composed and (b) practice in the total skill. Sometimes called whole task practice which contains various kinds of communicative activities.

They improve motivation: The learner’s ultimate objective is to take part in communication with the other. Their motivation to learn is more likely to be sustained if they can see how their classroom learning is related to this objective and help them to achieve it with increasing success.

Natural learning: In fact, many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural process which operate when a person is involve in using the language for communication if this is so communicative activity inside or outside the classroom.

To create a context, which supports learning: communicative activity provides opportunities for positive personal relationship to develop among learners and between learners and teacher.12
Today, language learning is seen as an activity which perceives students as complex human beings, and not simply as language learners. Students need practice in all skills in order to become efficient in the English language.

A number of activities can be used to prepare students to understand the use of language. The most common activity in a language classroom especially where language is taught through literature and language skills is to ask students to relate their own knowledge and experiences to the topic. The teacher should provide them with worksheets involving quiz, questionnaire, sentence stems to completed, statements to be discussed and the four language skills’ exercises.

The following are the most important activities to be dealt with:

1. Tasks on paragraph writing – organizing information into paragraphs.
2. Letter writing and précis.
3. Tasks on functional grammar: Agreeing, Disagreeing, Obligation, Possibility, Parts of Speech, Auxiliaries, Nouns, Prepositions, Sentence Structures, Correction of tenses, etc.
4. Reporting statements, questions (wh–and yes/no), requests, order, advice, intention, etc.
5. Tasks on language involving response, reason, result, reply, condition, consequence, elicitation, etc.
6. Tasks on pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm, etc.\textsuperscript{13}

Oral communication activities:

Role play, practising dialogues, debates, group discussion, etc. based on the contents.

The other reinforcements of skill are:

- Tasks related to language skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing) for proficiency.
- Tasks for writing and acting out dialogues.
- Tasks for summarizing a story.
- Tasks for words’ meaning.
- Tasks on making notes during listening or reading.
- Tasks on writing reports in note form for oral presentations.
- Discussions on textual questions.
- Tasks on paragraph and expansion of ideas.
- Tasks comparing features of different parts of the text.
- Task on relating cause and effect.\textsuperscript{14}
4.5. **EXERCISE:**\(^{15}\) (Adapted from 700 Classroom Activities)

What’s it used for? Do as the example.

   A kettle is used for boiling water.
   Scissors ..........................  
   A camera ............................  
   A brush ..............................  
   A bottle ..............................  
   A padlock ............................

1. Put these expressions into the table. Some go in more than one place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many, a lot of, how much, there are, not many, not much, a few, any, some, enough, plenty, there is.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question and Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Fill in the missing words in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consume</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve</td>
<td>Soluble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endanger</td>
<td></td>
<td>Danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inventor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Advice

Give advice for each of these problems, beginning: If I were you, I’d ……………

- I want to give up smoking.
- I can’t get to sleep at night.
- I keep dropping things.
- My flatmate’s really untidy.
- I love her, but she never calls.
- My dog keeps biting people.
- My hair won’t stay flat.
4. I wish and if only

Rewrite these sentences with I wish/if only in two ways, one with a past tense and the other with would, e.g. it’s raining. –

1) I wish/if only wasn’t raining.

2) I wish/if only it would stop raining.

She’s is singing that awful song again.
You’re unemployed.
It’s cold outside.
The lift is still not working.
I’ve had a nasty cold all week.
He’s late for the meeting again.
The streets are filthy.

5. If

Write what would happen if the situation was different, e.g. it’s raining; we’ll have to cancel the barbecue. – If it wasn’t raining, we’d have a barbecue. If it was sunny, we’d have a barbecue.
I don’t know the answer so I can’t tell you.

He gets headaches because he works so hard.

We don’t have enough space for a piano.

She’s ill. She can’t come to the party.

Life’s easy because we both have well-paid jobs.

He’s not tall enough to be a policeman.

I can’t give you a lift because I haven’t got a car.

She’s so rude: it’s not surprising they don’t like her.

6. The sooner the better

Write the endings to the following:

e.g. Teacher – The earlier we leave ……………..

Students – The sooner we’ll arrive.

The more you study ………………………

The more you drink ………………………

The less you know ……………………

The more we give him …………………

The longer we waited …………………
The cheaper the hotel ........................
The hotter it gets ...........................
The older he gets ...........................
The less she eats ............................
The more interesting the work .................

7. As …… as

Write sentences comparing the price of these things in the UK/USA/Australia/ .......... with the price in your country, e.g.

Cigarettes are almost twice as expensive in the Australia.

food, clothes, cigarettes, transport, entertainment, accommodation, cars.

Here are some expressions to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not quite</th>
<th>half</th>
<th>twice</th>
<th>three times</th>
<th>not really</th>
<th>as expensive as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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8. Weather forecast

Ask the following questions about the weather

What is the weather forecast for the next couple of days?

What kinds of weather are typical at different times of the year?

Make use of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
<td>It’s cold</td>
<td>It’s raining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sun</td>
<td>It’s cold country.</td>
<td>It rains a lot here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fog</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


9. Ibid; P.33.

10. Ibid; P.34.


