Enhancing General Vocabulary of ESL Students through Small Group Discussion

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Abstract: Majority of the students in India study in vernacular medium for their primary and secondary education. During their study they do not get that good exposure of English language. For learning any foreign language, four major skills should be balanced equally. Instead of using all four major skills, the students only make use of two skills: listening and reading and sometimes writing also but only for their home works. They never get chance to speak in front of the class and among their groups.

During a small survey, while interviewing a group of students, the researcher found some of their problems with English language. The students were complaining about grammar, sentence structure, pronunciation etc. But the majority of the students had problem with vocabulary. The sample group students claimed that, they know the word in their mother tongue but when they are asked to give its proper word in English, they fail. After the survey, the researcher, observed other students as well. And the conclusion was that a big number of vernacular medium students find problem with their vocabulary. This gave an idea to the researcher to bring a suitable way out to this problem.

Group discussion is considered to be the most effective approach of learning a language and logically arguing things. If group discussion is arranged, the learners should have some basic knowledge of language to present their views in favor or against the proposition. They should also have knowledge of how to put across one’s ideas.

Group discussion is an important activity in academic and administrative spheres. It is a systematic and purposeful interactive oral process. Here the exchange of ideas, thoughts and feelings take place through oral communication. The exchange of ideas takes place in a systematic and structured way. The participants sit facing each other almost in a semi-circle and express their views on the given topic/issue/problem.

Group discussion can also be used in classroom situations. Students, most of the times, do not get chance to use their target language orally. In this situation, group discussion is a tool that a teacher can easily use in classroom and make the class interactive. Through group discussion students learn how to present their thoughts, how to make an argument, how to present counter argument, what words or phrases should be used while presenting an idea or an argument. Hence in the present paper the researcher explores the use of small group discussion to enhance vocabulary of ESL students.

Research Questions

• Is Group Discussion a helpful tool in teaching vocabulary collaboratively?
• How efficiently the Group discussion method teaches vocabulary?
• Can GSL be enhanced using Small Group Discussion in classroom?

Research Design and Methodology
The researcher arranged a session with M.A. (ELT) semester 1 students, to get information about their vocabulary level, since the majority of the students belonged to the vernacular medium. During the talk, the researcher marked the level of vocabulary, low. On the basis of the session, the researcher decided to administer the approach to teach the students vocabulary and similarly teach them how to present their arguments in group discussion task.

The experiment began with the reading of the topics by the students. And a guided discussion task followed by the independent sessions of the rest of the topics. With the discussion of the second topic, the evaluation process also commenced.

Participants
The researcher decided to perform the research with the M.A (ELT) semester 1 students, as they had studied in vernacular medium till graduation. The selection of the participants was done randomly. Around twenty students participated in the research.

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Material
To perform the discussion task, the researcher prepared few topics. The selection of the topics was done keeping in mind the student’s familiarity with them. Each topic contained enough new words to discuss the new words and use them for the arguments. During the study, total six topics were discussed. The topics of the discussion were:

- Is cultural diversity a barrier to national integration?
- Today’s education system in India
- Mobile: Boon or a Curse
- Population
- Child labors
- Democracy in India

Trial
The trial was conducted in the classroom of H M Patel Institute of English Training and Research, VallabhVidhyanagar, Gujarat, India. It commenced with the teaching of Group Discussion strategies. In the first session the researcher discussed, what group discussion is? How it is done? How to put forward an argument? How to initiate? What set of words or phrases should use to present various points? etc.

For a better idea, the researcher showed the students a sample of Group discussion from an online article Group Discussion Tips (2015) that contained all the points, the researcher discussed all the points, the researcher discussed with the students.

GD – MOCK 1
Candidates are divided in groups of 8 to 10 and each group is tested by a panel of Judges. Usually topics of general interest are given by the panel to the group and the group is asked to proceed with discussion. Every candidate is supposed to express his opinion and views on the topic given. The time for discussion is approximately 20 minutes. During the discussion, the panel of interviewers quietly observes the performance and behavior of the candidates and makes their own assessment.

Mock Group Discussion:
Most topics are taken from the current political or economic scene so if one has just kept abreast of current affairs, then he will be able to make a mark. We give below a group discussion on a common topic and give some typical responses of students. We then analyze the discussion so that readers can develop their own strategy for themselves. Here we have interviewers & the candidates by name A, B, C, D, E & F.

JUDGE: Good morning. You can choose any topic you like or take a slip from that box. You are given one minute to think before you start with the discussion. The observers will not interfere in your discussion. If no conclusion is reached, we may ask each of you to speak for a minute on the topic at the end of the discussion. The topic on the slip is "Multinationals: Bane or Boon". I suggest you should start the discussion.

Mr. A: This is a good topic. I am against multinationals. We have Coke and Pepsi. Do we need them? We can manufacture our own soft drinks. Multinationals destroy the local industry and sell non-essential products.

Mr. B: I agree with you. What is the fun of having Coke and Pepsi? We have our own Campa Cola.

Mr. C: I think water is good enough.

Mr. D: We are not here to discuss soft drinks. The topic given to us is a much larger one. First, let us define multinational companies. They are merely large companies which operate in a number of countries. There could be some Indian multinationals also. So there is nothing wrong with them. The point is whether they have a good or bad impact on the host countries. We have to discuss their business practices and find out whether they are desirable or not.

Mr. E: That is a very good introduction to the topic. Multinational companies do serve an important function that they bring new products and technologies in countries which do not have them. And it is not just Coke and Pepsi. They set up power plants and build roads and bridges, which really help in the development of host countries.

Mr. F: But are they all that good? We have seen that they destroy local industry. In India they just took over existing companies. They came in areas of low technology. Moreover, we have to see why they come at all. They come for earning profits and often remit more money abroad than they bring in.

Mr. A: I agree with you. I am against multinationals. We can produce everything ourselves. We should be swadeshi in our approach. Why do we need multinational companies?

Mr. E: We may not need multinational companies but then it also means that our companies should not do business abroad. Can we live in an isolated world? The fact is that we are moving towards becoming a global village. The world is interconnected. Then we have also seen that foreign companies bring in business practices that we are impressed with. Look at foreign banks. They are so efficient and friendly that the nationalized banks look pathetic in comparison. I think we can learn a lot from multinationals if we keep our eyes and mind open.

Mr. B: Take a look at McDonald's. They are providing quality meals at affordable prices. One does not have to wait at their restaurants.

Mr. C: How do your account for the fact that they take out more than they put in and thus lead to impoverishing the country?

Mr. D: The fact is that every poor country needs foreign investment. Poor countries often lack resources of their own. That is why they have to invite foreign companies in. There is nothing wrong in this because then products like cars, air conditioners and so on can be made in poor countries. Often multinationals source products from different countries which help boost their export earnings.

Mr. E: We have been talking about Coke and Pepsi. It is well known that Pepsi is in the foods business also and has helped
farmers in Punjab by setting up modern farms to grow potatoes and tomatoes. Modern practices have helped the people in that area.

**Mr. A:** I still feel that multinationals are harmful for the country.

**Mr. D:** Well, there could be negative things associated with such companies. They may not be very good in their practices. But can we do without them? I think the best way is to invite them but also impose some controls so that they follow the laws of the country and do not indulge in unfair practices.

**Mr. E:** I think laws are applicable to everyone. Very often officials in poor countries take bribes. The fault lies not with the company which gives a bribe but the person who actually demands one. Why blame the companies for our own ills?

**Mr. A:** What about the money they take out?

**Mr. D:** We have had a good discussion and I think it is time to sum up. Multinationals may have good points and some bad ones too, but competition is never harmful for anyone. We cannot live in a protected economy any longer. We have been protected for many years and the results are there for everyone to see. Rather than be close about multinationals, let us invite them in selected areas so that we get foreign investment in areas which we are lacking. Laws can be strictly enforced that companies operate within limits and do not start meddling in political affairs.

**Analysis:** Though Mr. A started the discussion, he could not make any good points. Later, he could not give any points about why multinationals are bad. It is also a bad strategy to say at the outset whether you are for or against the topic. Remember, it is not a debate but a discussion. The first step should always be to introduce the topic without taking sides. See the way in which the discussion is proceeding and give arguments for or against. The observer is more interested in what you saying than knowing what you belief. The participation of Mr. B and C is below average. A candidate must make 3-4 interventions. Their arguments are also not well thought out and add nothing to the argument. It is important to say relevant things which make an impact.

Once the students were shown the sample, the researcher asked them to perform a same thing using another topic. Total twenty students participated in the research study. The researcher divided them into the group of five and gave them an article on ‘Is Cultural Diversity is a Barrier to National Integration?’ the students were given seven minutes to read and prepare themselves for the discussion. As the students were asked to read the article, the researcher also asked them to mark difficult words and highlight important words that they can use in the discussion. Since it was the first discussion, the researcher, at the end of the reading task, told them the meanings of the words that the students found difficult.

The researcher had prepared the criteria to evaluate the students’ performance. The evaluation criteria were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation Skill</th>
<th>Command of Language</th>
<th>Apt Language</th>
<th>Use of Vocabulary</th>
<th>Overall Performance</th>
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To evaluate the students’ performance, the researcher decided to frame criteria. It was also discussed that the performance of the students will be evaluated in the form of grades and not in marks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Performance</th>
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After the reading task of seven minutes, the researcher granted the students to discuss the topic. Meanwhile the researcher observed every student participating and evaluated them on the basis of their performances. The evaluation of the first topic (discussion) was as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Presentation Skill</th>
<th>Command of Language</th>
<th>Apt Language</th>
<th>Use of Vocabulary</th>
<th>Overall Performance</th>
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**Findings and Conclusion**

In order to enhance the general vocabulary level using Small Group Discussion, a few reading and discussion tasks were designed and administered. The very purpose of the entire study was to enhance the general vocabulary through Group Discussion at P.G. level. A random discussion was impracticable. The sample could adequately produce vocabulary for the discussion tasks. This task resulted into the research problem as ‘Enhancing General Service Vocabulary Using Small Group Discussion.’ The core concept of this experiment was to enhance the vocabulary level of the students through tasks and also teach them using those words to present their arguments in the Group Discussion Tasks. The students of M.A. ELT semester 1 at H M Patel Institute of English Training and Research formed the experimental groups for the study. Majority of the students had completed their study till graduation in Gujarati medium and their mother tongue was also Gujarati. A total number of twenty students participated in the present experiment.

**Major Findings**

The result from the analysis of the scores of the discussion task shows that there was a significant difference between the overall mean scores. The difference in the mean score suggested that the difference was due to the continuous practice done during the experiment. At the end, it can be concluded that group discussion technique to enhance general vocabulary and to make the students interactive can be done effectively in the classroom.

**References**


*Group Discussion*, Retrieved online from www.sastra.edu/nptl/download/Prof%20GPRagini/Pdf_New/Unit%2026.pdf
