

Contextualization: A Catalyst for Enhanced English Language Proficiency

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Abstract: In the dynamic landscape of English language teaching and learning, the quest for methodologies that transcend traditional paradigms remains incessant. Contextualization emerges as a transformative technique, wielding the power to redefine the contours of pedagogical efficacy. At its core, contextualization embodies a symbiotic fusion of linguistic instruction with the lived experiences and immediate surroundings of learners, thereby engendering a milieu conducive to heightened linguistic fluency and comprehension.

Against the backdrop of multilingualism, the exigency to cultivate English language proficiency assumes paramount significance, necessitating a departure from conventional pedagogical approaches towards more innovative and inclusive methodologies. This experimental inquiry endeavours to illuminate the pivotal role of contextualization within the ambit of English language instruction, with a specific focus on the engineering education domain. By harnessing the intrinsic synergy between learner experiences and social interactions, this study seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics underpinning language acquisition and communication proficiency within the English language milieu.

Through a judicious integration of contextualization techniques, learners are empowered to transcend linguistic barriers and embrace the nuances of the target language with unparalleled dexterity. Moreover, the strategic incorporation of authentic materials and real-world examples serves as a catalyst for sustained learner engagement and comprehension, thereby fostering an environment conducive to uninhibited linguistic exploration and acquisition.

The ensuing data analysis promises to illuminate hitherto uncharted pathways towards the cultivation of English language proficiency, thereby enriching the pedagogical discourse with empirically-grounded insights and informed conclusions.

Keywords: contextualization, English language teaching, multilingualism, authentic materials, pedagogical innovation, communication proficiency.

Introduction

The process of English language teaching and learning is undergoing many changes in the present era. Teachers of English language hunt for innovations to include in their teaching to make it more effective. The demand for English language in current generation is huge because most of the people around the world use it in their daily communication. Employment opportunities that are provided to the English language speaker are reasons for its rapid growth in non-English countries. The respect English speakers get is also another reason. The invention of teaching methods and strategies helped to make English language teaching and learning productive. Methods, approaches and techniques of English language teaching have their contribution in teaching and learning English in a convenient mode. Many researches were carried out to make English language teaching simple for non-native speakers.

In search of various languages teaching approaches contextualization can be useful approach to make teaching learning more effective for non-native speakers. Contextualization is an approach where the teacher can use it to make language teaching more effectively for disadvantaged or non-native speakers. This approach promotes learning interest among the learners whereas learner's context is preferred in language teaching. It can be one of the mediating approaches to enhance English communication skills among non-native speakers. This approach is applied by including culture and situations.

The term "contextualization" is defined by Oxford advanced learners dictionary is "to consider something in relation to the situation in which it happens or exists". The same can be simplified relating to teaching and learning is that; the use of learner's related background or situation in to make it more connected. Brelsford and Rogers (2008) defines the term contextualization "international effort to

extend learning beyond the classroom into relevant contexts in the real world, and it also entails bringing realities of those extra academic comments into the classroom". Students from different cultural background normally find difficult to understand the content or topics which were taught to them from out of their culture and context. So, to resolve the issues in teaching learning, the use of learner's background content with contextualizing teaching is essential to enhance their communication skills in English language.

Significance of the study

The proficiency of the person in using English language helps to clear any interviews. So, the teaching and learning English plays major role in anyone's life. Most of the learners from rural background fail to excel in English communication during campus placements at engineering level. The problem of learners evokes the teacher to search for innovative teaching strategies and methods.

In search of several teaching methods, techniques and strategies contextualization is the best strategy where we can motivate learners to reach the expected level of proficiency in English language.

The researcher thinks that the use of contextualization approach in teaching English proficiency is needed for the engineering graduates come from very remote and rural area. So, the study got its significance and need to be carried out for the benefits of the learner.

Literature review

Review of related literature helps the researcher to find out gaps of previously conducted researches. Many researches were reviewed to carry out present research by addressing gaps of the researches.

A study was carried out Maristy (2020) it was found that the approach of contextualization helped the learners to get motivated and to enhance written communication. The learned or enhanced skills help them to communicate in real life situations. Many positive changes were observed by the researcher through contextualization approach. The researcher only focused on written communication ignoring other basic skills which are important for communication. The same approach can be applied to enhance remained basic skills listening, speaking and reading.

Savic, V., & Shin, J. K. (2013) carried a study a pilot project titled "contextualizing language learning through stories in Serbia". The results of the study states that storytelling techniques can be used to improve learners' language learning abilities by relating stories to the learner's background. The pilot study only focuses to motivate learners to learn language it can be extended to improve communication skills of the learners at advance level for EFL learners.

Pustaka, R. (2010).carried out a study with eight grade students to create interest among students by using authentic materials in English language teaching specially focused to enhance reading skills. The results of the study discusses that students were able to focus on lessons and they became familiar with different reading strategies. The increased interest among students in reading was observed in the study. This study was carried for school level learners by ignoring other basic skills a language.

Yılmaz, D., & Karatepe, (2013). Conducted a study titled "Contextualization in the EFL Primary Classroom: A neglected issue in teacher education" and found that, there are different kinds of things which are related to contextualization. The six things are: personalization, individualization, localization, modernization, the use of immediate context and formulated information, they were able to use '*Personalization*' as the only main technique of contextualization, and even then in a limited way. This study provides way to carry out present study.

An essay was published by Paliwal, R., & Subramaniam, C. N. (2006).With title "Contextualizing the curriculum" and urges and promotes that multiple contextualization should be used while framing curriculum. This essay provides knowledge on various multiple contexts and techniques to design materials considering learners needs.

Wilson, A. (2021). Carried out a study on "Context and Contextualization: Hallmarks of Authentic Spoken English" and found that contextualization helps the learners to enhance their communication

skills. This study also provides some interesting techniques to enhance learners English language proficiency. The recommendations of the study help the researcher to carry present study.

Hassan, Z. M. (2014). Carried out a study on “Language contextualization and culture” and discusses some issues related to contextualization approach. This study tries to provide some definitions regarding culture, context and contextualization. This study helps the researcher to carry out present study by providing best understanding of the concepts of contextualization, culture and context.

Theory referenced by Allwright's (1998) with emphasize on contextualization which can create an engaging learning environment, preventing activities from becoming monotonous (teacher centred) to learner centred. This can engage learners providing their real life situations.

Above reviewed literature motivated researcher to carry present study as the previous researches have some research gaps to extend present research.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study are to:

- Identify learning problems of the learners.
- Address teacher's problems in teaching English language at engineering level.
- Use contextualization approach to enhance English language proficiency.
- Recommend suitable teaching strategies for engineering graduate to excel language proficiency.
- Suggest further research for effective English language teaching.

Hypothesis

Effective use of contextualization technique may help learners to improve their English language proficiency.

Research questions

1. What is the role of contextualization technique in enhancing English language proficiency?
2. How contextualization can impact on learner to get motivated to achieve English language proficiency?

Tools

Questionnaire

Questionnaire was prepared to collect data related to the learner's parental and educational background. It was administered to the students by the researcher and the collected data was analyzed to understand learner's parental and educational background which plays major role in conducting the present study.

Contextualized/Localized Materials in Teaching Learning

As part of conducting this research learner's culture related materials play major role. The researcher selected materials related to learner's background. The selected materials were graded to the level of the learners. Great leaders from the region, festivals celebrated, and freedom fighters from the learner's background were given priority in preparing materials. It can be called localization of teaching materials.

Subjects of the study

The subjects for the present study were 50 engineering undergraduate students from rural areas of Telangana. The chosen subjects for this study represent different educational and socioeconomic background of Telangana.

Research Procedure

The research was conducted in three phases of pre teaching, while teaching and post teaching. Each phase of the study is used to have keen observation on teaching learning problems with the concentration on research questions. All the three phases of the study were recorded to analyze the data collected. Pre teaching phase focuses on learner's personal profile, parental and educational background. It also covers with learners opinion on the existing syllabus they are taught.

The second phase of the study focuses on the use of contextualization technique in classroom with the use of contextualized materials. Keen observation was done by using checklist of learner's participation in the classroom activities.

The third phase of the research focuses on post teaching by collecting data from students about their experience in learning contextualization technique. The responses of the learners were recorded and analyzed to indicate the effect of contextualization approach in enhancing language proficiency.

Materials and Methods

Action research was the method used to carry present study which consists of four stages; planning, action, observation, and reflection considering four basic skills of English communication.

The collection of data included classroom observations, student questionnaires, analysis of student performance of LSRW skills, and feedback from students after the use of contextualization approach. The enhancement of skills of learners was measured using their development in fluency in speaking, reading comprehension, effective listening, effective paragraph organization, idea generation, correct use of grammar, and improved student motivation.

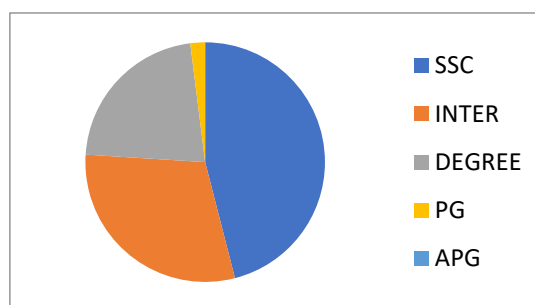
Results and Discussion

The collection of data from various sources and analysis of it with care helps the researcher to provide valuable implications for better teaching practices. The performances of the students in various activities were examined and analyzed in detail.

Analysis of Student Questionnaire

The collected data out of the student questionnaire was analyzed by the researcher and represented the same in the form of graphical representation. Each question was analyzed and report is presented followed by the pie chart.

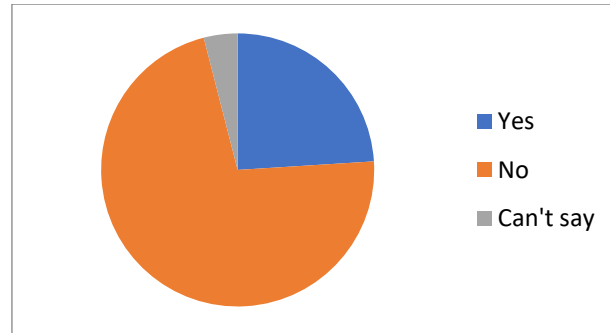
1. What is the educational background of your parent?



Graph-1

The above graph represents the educational qualification of parents of the sample for research. The responses from 50 students indicate that, 23 student's parents' studies matriculation. Whereas, 15 students parents from intermediate background and 11 with graduation qualification and only one with post graduation and none from above post graduation.

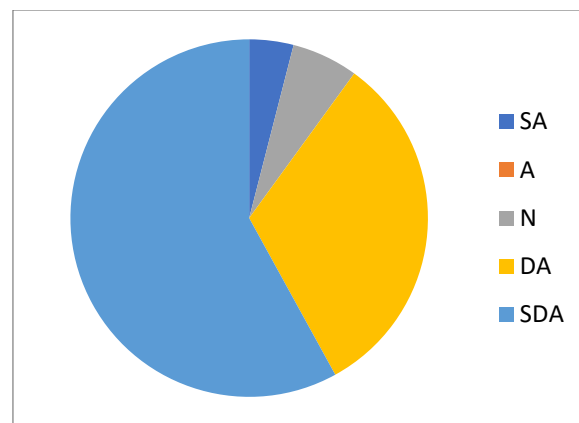
2. Do you use English language in your regular communication other than classroom?



Graph-2

Graphical representation of sample responses conveys the data regarding use of English by the learners other than English classroom. Out of 50, 12 students responded that they use English language outside the English classroom and 36 say that they don't use English other than English classroom and 2 students are not able to respond for either.

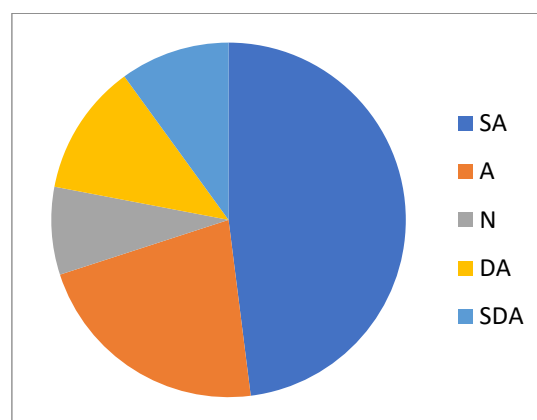
3. My teachers discourage me to speak English in the classroom.



Graph-3

The above question was intended to know teachers role in motivating students to learn English language. 29 students strongly disagreed that, their teacher motivates them to learn English 16 students disagreed. Whereas 3 students stand neutral and 2 stand with strongly agree.

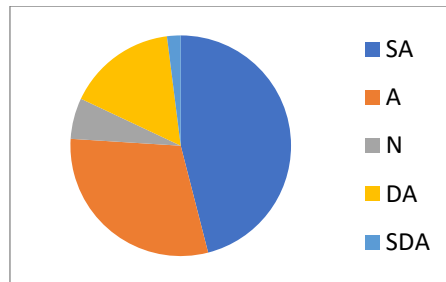
4. I utilize the opportunity provided by my teacher to improve my communication skills.



Graph-4

Above data represents utilization of opportunity by students in English class to improve their communication skills. 24 students strongly agreed and 11 agreed to it. Whereas, 4 students stand neutral as 6 disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed to the statement.

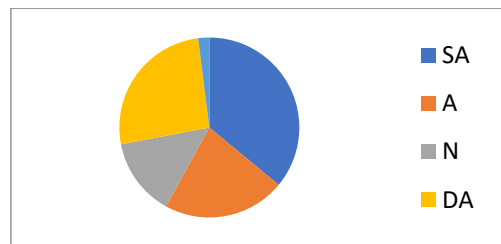
5. The English syllabus has to be revised where it does not address students need.



Graph-5

Graph-5 presents opinion of sample regarding existing syllabus. 23 students strongly support with their response and 15 students supports by agreement. Whereas, 3 stay neutral and 8 disagree to the statement and only 1 student strongly disagree with it.

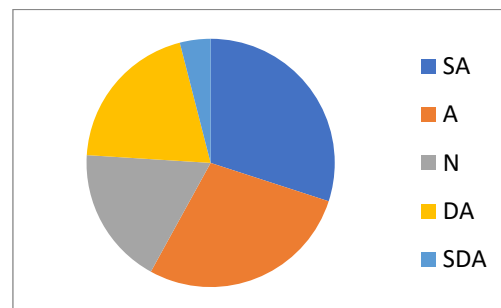
6. I try to understand unknown words by its situation or context.



Graph-6

Above data conveys how contextualization technique helps students to understand unknown words or vocabulary. 18 students strongly agreed that they can understand words by context 11 students agreed. 7 students stand neutral other 13 learners disagreed and only 1 strongly disagreed with the statement.

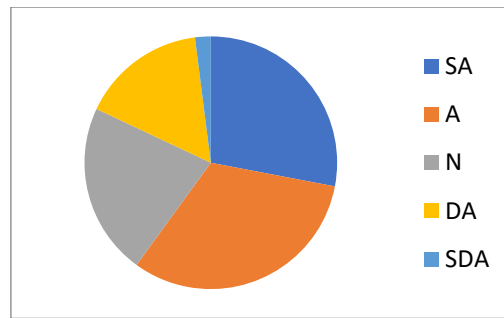
7. My English teacher uses mother tongue during English class to explain the content.



Graph-7

Above graph presents data related to teacher's use of learner's mother tongue in English teaching to deliver content and make them understand. 15 strongly agreed and 14 agreed that their teacher uses mother tongue in teaching English. Whereas, 9 students opine with neutral and 10 responders disagreed only 2 strongly disagree with the statement.

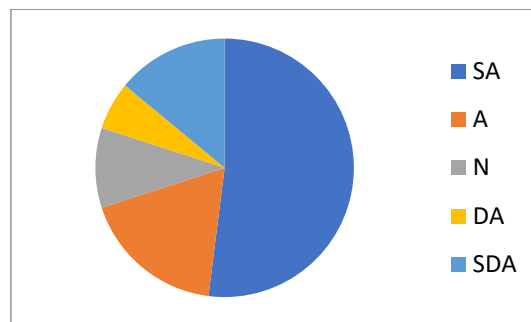
8. I feel comfort when my English teacher allows me to talk my mother tongue in the classroom.



Graph-8

This statement was made to know learner's comfort language (mother tongue or English language) in English classroom. 14 students strongly agreed with the statement whereas, 16 agreed. 11 students stand with neutral and 8 disagreed only 1 respondent strongly disagree with the statement.

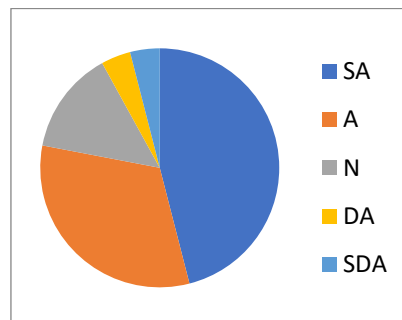
9. I think that we must have content in the textbook relating to our culture.



Graph-9

This graph represents the data of student opinion on inclusion of their culture in English textbook. 26 strongly agreed and 9 agreed with it. 5 students stand on neutral where, 3 disagreed and 7 stand with strongly disagree to the statement.

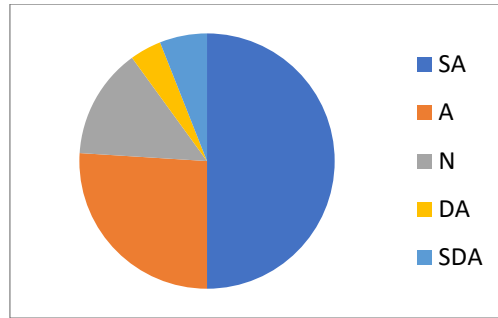
10. I feel happy when I see the text which is related to my culture.



Graph-10

This statement was finished to know learner's feel regarding their culture in the text. 23 strongly agreed and 16 agreed to it. 7 students stand neutral where 2 disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed with the statement.

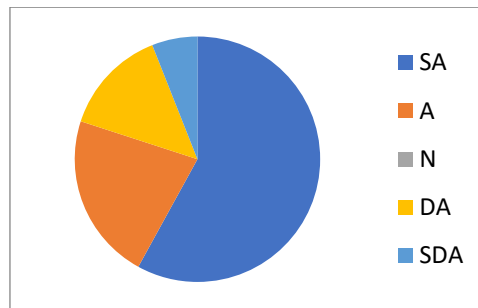
11. I was confident enough to talk about the text which is been used to teach us basic language skills?



Graph-11

This statement meant to know increment of student's confidence in speaking skills. 25 students responded for strongly agreed and 13 for agreed. 7 students stand with neutral. Where, 2 disagree and 3 strongly disagree to it.

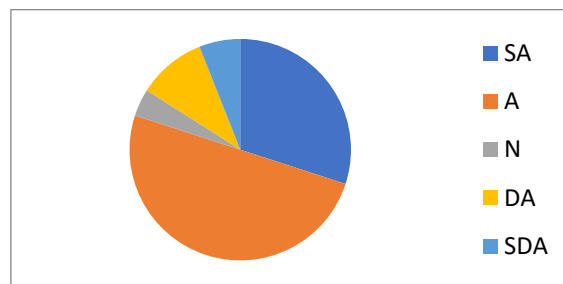
12. I do expect the same kind of text (culturally related) in future classes too.



Graph-12

The graph represents learner's opinion on culturally related text in their future learning. 29 students strongly agreed and 11 agreed with it. 7 learners disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed with the statement.

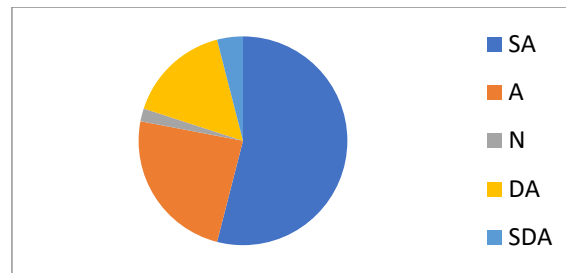
13. I was excited to see the content of my culture in English class.



Graph-13

This statement formed to analyze learner's interest in their culture related content in English class. As 50 students responded and 15 strongly agreed and 25 agreed with it. 2 students stand with neutral. 5 responders disagree and 3 strongly disagree to the statement.

14. I feel proud to write about the festival we celebrate at our home.



Graph-14

This graphical representation conveys learner's opinion regarding their feel to write about the festivals they celebrate at home. 27 strongly agree 12 agree that, they feel proud to write about their festivals where, 1 stands neutral as 8 disagree and 2 strongly disagree with above statement.

Activities used to Enhance Communication Skills

Discussion:

This activity was conducted to by introducing contemporary topic like politics, social practices, education, role of youth in nation building, role of youth in politics and other recent happening in the society to share their opinion and suggestions for improvement. Learners were given sufficient time to think and take part in discussion.

Debate:

It is another activity to check learners' emotional balance and flow of thinking abilities relating their views and opinion on contemporary issues/situations. Keen observation by the researcher was done to evaluate learner's performance during the activity.

Presentation:

Learners were assigned tasks to study some issues in the society and collect related data. Detailed analysis was done by the students presented same in the class. The researcher examined learners' social communication skills by the presentation of the data he/she collected.

Performances of the learners from various activities were observed and analyzed closely to reach for conclusion. Difference in the performance and learners interest in various activities were discussed in detailed in results and discussion section.

The basic skills are considered to evaluate learners' communication skills in English.

Listening Skills:

Learners listening skills were tested and evaluated by conducting debates and discussion in the class. Learners listening skills were enhanced because, learners were curious in listening to their peers as they discussed issues which are related their real life situations. They could respond to them in need of the discussion.

Speaking Skills:

Learners acquired good speaking skills with accurate use of grammar structure in their spoken communication. They were very enthusiastic to talk about the situation which they were aware of. The keen observation by the researcher found that they had interest in listening and speaking of the situation which relates to them.

Reading Skills:

Learners were tested reading skills by providing texts related to their context like; some festivals which are celebrated in their areas were covered with reading comprehension passages. The learners were able to answer all the questions which were followed the reading comprehensions passage.

Writing Skills:

Written communications skills of the learners were tested by providing some situations and asked them to imagine, think and write. Some information gap texts were given and asked them to complete the text. The learners were able to imagine something and complete the text. This skill is treated as high grade skills among all basic skills where, learners considered being good communicator.

The performance of the learners with regards to the above skills by introducing contextualizing approach enhanced comparing to their previous performance in all above skills of English communication.

Feedback from Students:

Learners' feedback was received to know their experience in taking part in above activities. All the learners were happy to have situations which are related to their native context. They were really happy to talk about their people, culture, festivals and freedom fighters of their region. Students also shared that this kind of innovative experiments help them to get motivated towards learning English language.

Recommendations

After collecting and analyzing data carefully the following recommendations are made for inclusive education:

- Course designers should consider learners need in designing materials
- Inclusion of learners' culture in language teaching helps to enhance learners language proficiency.
- Teacher should introduce innovative teaching approaches and techniques to make teaching learning more effective.
- Contextualization promotes learners culture so, they get interest in it curriculum design must be contextualized based on learners need.
- Need based teaching-learning should be encouraged from elementary education.

Overall, this study explored how students use English and their feelings about learning it. Most students' parents only completed basic education, which may impact their language skills. A significant 72% of students don't use English outside school, highlighting a lack of practice. Over half felt their teachers didn't encourage them to speak English, which could hinder learning. While 70% tried to make the most of classroom opportunities, 22% disagreed, indicating not everyone is engaged. Additionally, 76% wanted the English syllabus to be updated to better meet their needs. About 58% found it helpful to learn new words through context, and there were mixed feelings about using their first language in English classes, with 58% in support. Many students (60%) felt comfortable using their mother tongue in class, and a strong majority (70%) desired culturally relevant content in textbooks. Most students (78%) felt happy when they saw their culture in lessons and 76% felt confident discussing what they learned. A clear 80% wanted similar cultural content in future classes, with 80% expressing excitement about these topics. Finally, about 78% felt proud to write about their festivals, showing that personal stories are important. In summary, incorporating cultural content and encouraging English use can significantly enhance students' language skills and confidence.

Further Research

Above research is limited to the engineering under graduation level the same study can be conducted any part of the world. The same study can be conducted at various levels of the academics to promote contextualization approach.

Conclusion

Contextualization is an excellent approach which promotes meaningful teaching learning for non-native speakers. So, it is the time for all academicians to consider and continue their teaching practice by using contextualization approach in language teaching. The awareness of a teacher on the contextualization approach can lead to a shift in teaching practices towards more student-centred and culture inclusive.

The non-native speaker of English from countries like India would benefit in their academic transaction. The Teachers of English can make their teaching more effective by incorporating learners' related culture and context in their teaching. This approach helps teachers to activate students' background knowledge to enhance English communication skills and their overall learning experience better than previous one. This approach can be applied at every level of education. This approach also leads to sensitize the cultural differences among students.

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