

WARM UP ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: PERSPECTIVES OF AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

S. Chowdhury

ABSTRACT

Warm up activity refers to gentle and fun-based exercises which could be very instrumental and effective tools to teach English language to Agriculture students. Adapting mixed method research, this study investigates Agriculture students' perception toward the role of the warm up activities in classroom learning, and the problems faced by them in practicing the activities. Through the discussion on the findings, the importance of using warm up activities in English language classroom has been highlighted. The findings of the study may inspire not only the English language teachers but also the teachers from other disciplines to facilitate appropriate warm up activities to accelerate classroom teaching and learning.

Keywords: agriculture students, Bangladesh, English, teaching perception, warm up activities⁷

INTRODUCTION

Warm up activities inject interest and energy in students toward the classroom learning. The main intention behind using warm up activities by teachers is to set up a stress-free classroom environment by evoking students' motivation and triggering active participation in the class to ensure effective learning. Lassche (2005) defines warm up session as the "initial orientation" for a language learning lesson (p. 83). According to Robertson and Acklam (2000), "warm up is a short activity for the beginning of a lesson" (p.30). There is a huge impact of warm up activities on students' learning process. Allwright (1984) opines that warm up activities can help students to work successfully both individually and in group by centering their attention to the classroom. Dornyei (2001) also believes that warm up activities arouse appetite and curiosity for learning in the classroom and thus involve the students in the classroom activities spontaneously. To apply warm up activities effectively in classroom, Velandia (2008) proposes some principles that should be considered while designing such activities for students. The principles are projected through the following diagram 1.

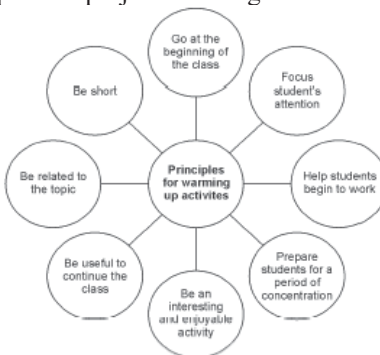


Diagram 1. Aspects to be considered in a warm up activity.

The maxims to prepare warm up activities suggest that with the aim of drawing students' attention to the classroom, warm up activities should be conducted at the very beginning session of a class. He emphasises to keep the warm up activities not only short and exciting but also relevant and helpful to make students understand the lesson of the class. He also adds three strategies like "breaking the

monotony of learning”, “making the tasks more interesting” and “increasing the involvement of the students” to be maintained while implementing the warm up activities in classroom.

Warm up activities are viewed, approached and practiced differently by different levels of learners. For agriculture students, practicing warm up activities in English language classrooms might be a new experience as this is not a regular practice in their other classes. So, the objective of the study is to explore how the Agriculture tertiary level learners view the role of warm up activities that are practiced in their English language classrooms. Therefore, the research questions set for the study were: (1) what are the agriculture students’ perspectives toward the use of warm up activities in English language classroom and (2) what are the problems faced by the students while applying warm-up approach in English language teaching?

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study applies mixed method research. It employs both qualitative and quantitative method to elicit students’ authentic responses toward the role of warm up activities practiced in English language classes.

Instrument

To collect data for the study, distribution of a five points’ Likert scale questionnaire among students, and a focused group interview with the target students had been conducted. The following Likert scale questionnaire had been used for students which ranges from the point “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and contains eight statements. The students were asked to put tick mark (√) on the response that best indicates their level of agreement with the statement.

Table 1. Likert scale questionnaire for students

No.	Statements	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
01	I am familiar with warm up/ice breaking activities practiced in English language class					
02	Warm up activities help to remove my shyness in classroom activities					
03	Warm up activities create my interest towards learning in class					
04	Warm up activities help to build friendly relationship with teacher and classmates					
05	I think warm up activities should be a regular practice in English language classes					
06	I think warm up activities do not bring any noticeable change in classroom learning					
07	I don’t feel comfortable to participate in warm up activities in English language class					
08	I think practicing warm up activities in class is a wastage of time					

To find out what difficulties students face during implementing warm up activities in classroom, a focused group interview consisting of three questions was arranged. The interview questions (as given below) were mixed of close ended, open-ended and high gain questions that helped students to generate insightful answers:

1. Do you face any difficulties or problems in taking part in warm up activities?
2. What kinds of problem do you face?
3. Do you have any opinion how the difficulties can be overcome to make the warm up activities more enjoyable?

Sampling

To collect students' responses on the questionnaire, seventy students were selected from Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University who attended an Advanced English course with different English language teachers for six months as non-major English students. Moreover, ten students were the participants for the focused group interview. They were also from Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University and the students of the Advanced English course. However, they were a different group than the previous group who attended the survey.

Method of data collection

The Likert scale questionnaire was distributed among students in the concerned university by their concerned English language teachers as managed by the author previously. Students were approached after their English language classes. Before distributing the questionnaire, they were explained the topic and objective of the study. The author conducted the focused group interview with the students' participants at their mutual convenient time. Their responses were collected by taking notes manually.

Method of data analysis

The Likert scale items in the questionnaire for students produced quantitative data and the interview questions for students produced qualitative data. The quantitative data was analysed following descriptive statistics method (finding and analysing frequencies and means) to show the level of the students' agreement and disagreement to the statements. To interpret the means of the statements, "strongly disagree" was considered as scale 1 (indicator of lowest value) and "strongly agree" was considered as scale 5 (indicator of highest value). The result of the subtraction between the highest and lowest scale was divided into three equal portions. Following this calculation, mean 1 to 2.33 was treated as "negative value", mean 2.34 to 3.67 was treated as "positive value" and mean 3.68 to 5.00 was treated as "highly positive value".

Besides, interview responses were analysed following descriptive analysis method to provide a detail view of the participants' opinions.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Research question 1: What are the Agriculture students' perspectives toward the use of warm up activities in English language classroom?

The eight statements in the Likert scale questionnaire were the representatives of the students' perspective toward the use of warm up activities in English language classroom. The presentation and interpretation of the data are presented below.

Table 2. Students' perspective toward the use of warm up activities in English language classroom

Statement No	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	%	%	%	%	%	
01	41.42	40	14.28	2.85	1.42	4.17
02	62.85	34.28	2.85	0	0	4.6
03	57.14	32.85	10%	0	0	4.47
04	70	25.71	4.28	0	0	4.65
05	58.57	24.28	15.71	1.42	0	4.4
06	5.71	11.42	12.85	42.85	27.14	2.25
07	7.14	8.57	17.14	41.42	25.71	2.3
08	5.71	1.42	2.85	18.57	71.42	1.51

5= Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2= Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree; %= Percentage

Interpretation of the data

According to the table, statements number 2, 4, 3, 5 and 1 achieve the greater frequency rate on the level of students' agreement which are respectively 97.13%, 95.71%, 89.99%, 82.85%, and 80.40%.

Simultaneously, the means obtained for these statements (1 to 5) are also highly positive as they are in between the mean value of 3.68 to 5.00.

On the other hand, statement number 8, 6 and 7 have the highest frequency rate on their level of disagreement which are respectively 89.99%, 69.99% and 67.13%. Consequently, the means calculated for these statements (6 to 8) are indicators of a negative view as they are in between the mean of 1 to 2.33.

The findings from the students' questionnaire clearly state that except a minor group of the students, the majority of the students possess a highly positive view toward the role of warm up activities in classroom learning. They assertively find such activities as supportive to lower their anxiety level and increasing their performance in classroom as warm up activities give them a scope to be easy with the teacher and classmates at the beginning of a session. Moreover, warm up activities assist them to increase their motivation and interest toward the English language class which eventually accelerate their learning effectively.

Now, a possible explanation of the minority of the students' not-welcoming attitude toward the role of warm up activities in English language classroom could be that either they are extremely introvert students or the students who are habituated in traditional lecture-based classrooms. Teachers should pay special attention to them to address these students so that they can feel interested and connected to warm up activities practiced in their classroom.

Research question 2: What are the problems faced by the students while applying warm up approach in English language teaching?

Students came up with several difficulties when they were asked if they face any problem in taking part in warm up activities. While most of them (7 students out of 10) did not report any problems, 3 participants mentioned some difficulties. Firstly, they said that sometimes they feel warm up activities are fruitless as they do not have any direct connection with exam or give any idea about exam questions. This response shows that students who are very much exam-oriented and comfortable in traditional lecture-based classes do not find warm up activities very beneficial for them. Furthermore, they mentioned that sometimes warm up activities employ group work and pair work where fast learners dominate the others and the lazy students remain inactive. As a result, warm activities do not positively affect them very much.

Nevertheless, they all opined that warm up activities can be very beneficial for students in English language classes if certain things are maintained. According to them, warm up activities will be more enjoyable if there is a variety in the types and nature of the activities; otherwise repeating the same type of activity could be monotonous to students for which they may lose their attraction to it. They added that, the practice of warm up activities should not be very frequent (like more than once in one class) that may distract them from the main focus of the class. They also stressed the matter that the duration of the warm up activities should not be very long that may produce tiring effect on them.

Students' opinions imply that the teachers need to be very careful in choosing and applying warm up activities so that students find them relevant and meaningful to their class contents.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study aimed to find out the Agriculture students' attitude to warm up activity, a teaching practice that is often overlooked by the teachers but has significant impact on classroom learning. The findings of the study reveal that warm up activities have a complementary and supportive role to classroom teaching but not a mandatory role. Majority of the students (94%) believe that warm up activities have a positive role to sharpen their' learning process by stimulating their schema and enhancing language acquisition factors. The study also discloses that while implementing warm up approach in teaching, no major difficulty is faced by the students except not having direct connection with exam, and facing domination of fast learners in the warm up activities. In addition, the findings also urge that students' needs and demand should be considered while selecting warm up activities to be practiced in English language classrooms.

As the findings of the study suggest that majority of students usually find warm up activities motivating and impactful for their learning, it might be recommended that the use of such activities should be a regular practice not only in English language teaching but also in teaching other subjects. Besides, it should be kept in mind that the main-stream Bangladeshi students are yet to be habituated with innovative teaching activities and keener to exam-oriented learning system. So, expecting their spontaneous participation in creative warm up activities might come out as a frustration to teachers sometimes. When this is obviously a pressure on the shoulder of the teachers, yet there is a way out of course. The teachers need to understand students' need and context of study and choose teaching tools accordingly. The best learning outcome could be possible to gain, if teachers can arouse and capture students' full concentration successfully in classroom through the appropriate utilization of warm up activities

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