



## Higher Order Thinking Skills through Online Discount Coupons

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Received 25th March 2016, Accepted 10th May 2016

### Abstract

*This article explores the possibilities of enhancing one's ability to communicate and to build up critical questioning and research skills. The researchers have followed the Inquiry-based Learning (IBL) approach from Charlotte Rance and experimented with the Indian second language learners of English. The study attempts to find out whether IBL is really beneficial and to explain how far it develops one's communication skills, collaboration and questioning skills through research. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the findings are elucidated and discussed. Since the process deals with online shopping and the coupons it offers, it not only enhances language acquisition but also can enable the learner to know about business strategies and develop analytical skills.*

**Keywords:** Inquiry-based Learning (IBL), online shopping, discount coupons.

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### Introduction

Whenever we open our mail inbox, we find a superfluous overflow of discount coupons in the promotion column of our mail. Starting from online shopping sites like Amazon, Flipkart and eBay which give discount prices every week and from eBay we could enrich our vocabulary like manufacture refurbished, collectibles, auctioneers, etc. EBay comes with a unique slogan for every product which makes us learn new words. Then we have travel offers from various tourist sites like Make My Trip and Goibibo. Their offers are very attractive which makes us to go for them. And offers from Group on and other ecommerce market places and also from insurance companies are so tempting that they make us to try shopping at least once. We have no clue about how they manage to come up with such low discounted rates. Last year when one of us bought air tickets to go home and be back every month at a discounted price from an Indian based airline Spicejet, it caused a flurry among our colleagues and friends. Some of them have researched about the offers and enquired about them through customer care. If such deals could cause such a huge interest among people, we thought, why it can't be converted into a learning material for ESL learners.

### Language through Online Deals

Nobody can escape from the offers that we get through online coupons and vouchers. India is popular

with brands like Flipkart, Jabong, Amazon, Snapdeal and eBay for online shopping, Redbus and Ticket Goose for local travel, Make My Trip, Cleartrip and Goibibo for international travels and hotel bookings. Apart from these portals, we have separate applications and sites for restaurants, clubs, spas, etc. This plethora of sites can make one get enough ideas to cover and even set up a mini business related project and set up prime deals-related analysis about purchasing through special offers on the e-commerce websites. These sites even have the potential of covering the ESL curriculum – grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing, and communication skills.

### Inquiry Based Learning

"Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand."

- Joe Exline

Inquiry based learning (IBL) is a way of learning through questions and experimentations. Unfortunately our present traditional education system has discouraged the natural process of learning through questions. Effective learning takes place when individuals develop to convert information and data into useful knowledge. IBL involves various factors like a context for questions, a framework of analytical thinking, a focus for research, and different levels of critical thinking. Well-designed inquiry based learning produces knowledge formation that can be widely applied. In ELT context, we can say IBL is an effective way of learning English language. For language learning, IBL provides greater opportunities to create lessons

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which are interesting, cross-cultural and practical. They can acquire language through real life situations. Instead of focusing on target vocabularies, drilling method, and remembering sentence structures, students are in the habit of using their known language in day-to-day situations to solve problems, and think creatively. It's a student-centred learning, and this kind of learning should encourage various platforms for them to learn the language.

### Importance of Inquiry Based Learning

The IBL approach can develop problem solving skills, research skills and management skills which can be useful both in school and at work. It enables and trains the student to acquire these skills which last for a life time. IBL can promote these skills and make the students to be critical and creative which facilitates them to work at any given situation. Another important benefit is that IBL encourages students to be self-sufficient. They have the opportunity to learn from their classmates, which helps them in developing team building skills. IBL is practical and answers real world questions. So we are free to choose a real world problem or situation and the target language can be achieved through this. With this we are able to make possible the exercises and lessons personal to our student which interest them.

### Practical Usage

As there are wide variety of coupons and deals, there are chances of applying IBL to find out which suits best for whom and at what situations. IBL is way of learning through questions and answers. This way of learning is more suitable for the young because they are generally curious. Combination of IBL and attractive offers makes them to involve 100 per cent in learning. IBL in the context of ESL/EFL makes them develop research skills, prepare questionnaire and find out solutions for real world problems. This approach not only develops one's language skills but also develops his/her critical and analytical thinking skills. As Charlotte Rance said, IBL provides great opportunity to create lessons which are interesting, practical and cross-

curricular. Instead of focusing on drilling, conventional and achievement test methods, it assists learners in using the language to think creatively and to solve problems. In the present scenario, a person's success depends not on his hard work but also on his smart work. It's the role of the teacher to facilitate students to mould themselves for that kind of smart work.

### Methodology

The facilitators chose a homogeneous group of 30 undergraduate students from a University. They were each asked to select any one deal (i.e. with an offer coupon) from an online site and were asked to compare it with the prices for the similar product from other sites. The students had to come up with a set of questions and called the customer care of the site that offered the discount to clarify their questions. They also did a small research about similar offers, if any, by different companies about the same product. This made them to get an idea about the marketing strategy adopted by each commercial portal. This experiment not only develops research skills, but by skimming and scanning of various offers and deals, the participants also studied vocabulary on a selected offer. They have also practised on their communication skills by calling the customer care to check the authenticity and to have more clarity about the offer. They have also read the reviewers' column of the websites which offered deals. The participants also wrote an in depth evaluation about the offer of a specific product by one ecommerce portal in comparison with other similar portals. As a student in general, their English improved. They enjoyed a simulated online shopping experience and most of them shared it through mini presentation and reviews. They also came out with an idea of selling their own product to attract potential buyers through eBay and Olx to sell their used product.

### Interpretation

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between inquiry based learning effectiveness and the skills exhibited through online shopping.

**Table I.** Correlation between IBL and the Aspects of Skills Acquired (N= 30)

Variables	Inquiry Based Learning Effectiveness
Communication Skills	0.61
Collaboration	0.56
Analytical skills	0.49
Problem Solving Skills	0.52
Research Skills	0.54
Questioning Skills	0.65

As seen in Table I, IBL effectiveness showed significant positive correlation with all the aspects of the skill acquired (r ranging from 0.65 to 0.49). Thus it can

be assumed that all the aspects of the skills show a significant positive relationship with the IBL effectiveness.

**Table II.** Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting IBL Effectiveness

Variables	$\beta$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-Value
Communication Skills	0.61	0.42	F = 24.84, p<0.001
Collaboration	0.31	0.51	
Questioning Skills	0.30	0.54	

The results presented in Table II indicate that three aspects of soft skills i.e. communication skills ( $\beta=0.61$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), collaboration ( $\beta=0.31$ ,  $p,0.001$ ) and questioning skills ( $\beta=0.30$ ,  $p,0.01$ ) emerged as positive predictors of inquiry based learning effectiveness accounting for a variance of 55% ( $F=24.84$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This is understandable given that these are core skills that can be immediately experienced and observed in an individual's behaviour. While other factors such as analytical skills, research skills and problem solving skills signify positive association, they may be factors which are probably difficult to judge in such a short span of time. The current findings are significant from the point that these may be the most critical elements of skills acquired through IBL which assist the learners to enhance their language acquisition capabilities.

### Outcome

#### Communication Skills

The students were asked to prepare a set of questions while skimming and scanning the important information from advertisements. With such a set of questions, they could negotiate with the vendor regarding some offers and also crosscheck certain dates and prices. A few students made actual purchases during the project period. One student received a mail from redBus (which is an online travel booking company) regarding a discount they offered to him, but he received the mail only after the expiry date of the offer deadline. So he had to negotiate with the customer care of the company and got it further discounted. Another student narrated his experience on a stay at a 3 star hotel which he got at a very normal price because of the value added points he had gained through shopping. A few students wrote reviews in the columns of the online shopping websites. They shared all such experiences during the mini presentation stage. Both the simulated and the real time shopping experiences enabled the students to be more fluent in the use of the language.

#### Collaboration

Collaboration can also happen outside the classroom like in the online forums, social media and with other colleges. In order to buy an iPhone, a participant collaborated with friends online all over the world and found an iPhone which he could buy on a cheaper price. He compared different rates from eBay of different countries. He collaborated with people from different countries online and they shared with him their price listing in their countries. This made him to choose the best price he can pay for an iPhone. Another student was interested to come up with a dish of different

culture. She had to go to her online community, where she could find people from different cultures. She could gather information from them and finally could come up with a Japanese dish. She shared that dish along with her family members and showed the photos in the class.

#### Questioning Skills

Young learners are naturally curious and encouraging them to do so will be more rewarding. One student came across an offer from Goibibo, an online travel booking agency. They offered him a cash back offer of 1500 rupees off on any flight ticket when he would refer somebody to use the Goibibo application. But only after further inquiry he found out that he would receive the cash back only in his Goibibo wallet and he could not use the full 1500 cash on a single booking. He would get only 10% off of the flight ticket price for every booking. Even though initially it seemed like a win-win situation for him, it actually wanted to make him book more tickets to use the full 1500 cash back. After discussing this with his friends and analysing the marketing strategy about the deal he found out that they would give him 1500 rupees as virtual money and make him to pay more than 15000 rupees to use that virtual money. The students in their presentations told their peers that posing a lot of questions to the customer care and also to friends enabled them to learn more about the offers made by the ecommerce portals.

#### Conclusion

To sum up, this experiment proves that to use IBL approach with online offers can be a fruitful experience. This kind of learning can make learning an enjoyable and non-monotonous one. As a student, their English improved, so did the speed of purchasing online and asking queries. The students enjoyed their shopping experiences and often shared them in class presentations. It may initially be difficult to introduce this approach in a rural class, but the teacher has to motivate himself/herself and take time to reach this to the students. Some rural students may not be aware of online shopping but once they pick up, it will be a good approach to impart skills which are required for the contemporary society.

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