

Research on Humanities and Social Sciences
ISSN 2224-5766(Paper) ISSN 2225-0484(Online)
Vol.2, No.1, 2012

www.iiste.org



Action! Fun! Let's Learn English Language

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Abstract

Recent research reveals that students' attitudes and academic achievement improve when learning experiences revolve around their interests, talents and needs. In order to facilitate learning, teachers or language educators have to provide highly engaging learning experiences, which are both motivating and challenging to learners. Language acquisition and teaching strategies are key terms that are significant in language learning and teaching. Success in learning English is due to many factors such as motivation, classroom management, methodology, teachers' efforts and skills, students' interests, teaching materials, lesson plans and so on. Students become very excited when lesson games and drama activities are included in their lessons. They learn English naturally and enjoyably.

Keywords: learning English, achievement, motivation, interest, teaching material

1. Factors that Influence Language Learning

1.1 Motivation and Learning Strategies

Motivation is a significant factor because it is an internal drive that inspires somebody to pursue a course of action. Goals are also crucial for students and language learners may possess different targets. Long-term goals may be linked to students' desire of acquiring a better job. On the other hand, short-term goals may include the urge to pass a test or examination at the end of a term or semester. Harmer (2003) and Lile (2002) maintain that teacher's role is the most significant factor affecting students' motivation. The teacher has to be dedicated and make the vast knowledge in that personal event as well as the teaching and learning process. In addition, the teacher has to transmit the knowledge mass he possess before, during and after the event, and make it part of his students' knowledge. Levesque et al. (2011) defined the two types of motivation namely as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. Intrinsic motivation is considered as the most self-determined and autonomous form of motivation. It exists when a person works due to an inner desire to accomplish a task successfully. That is, those who are intrinsically motivated, choose to engage in activities just for their own pleasure, enjoyment, interest and satisfaction derived from doing those very activities.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is divided into integrative and instrumental motivation. The first involves the desire to identify with and integrate the target-language culture and the latter is the wish to learn the language for purpose of study or career (Harmer 2003; Ur 1996). It is found that the integrative motivation was more characteristic of the successful second language learner than the instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is firmly based on the personality of the learner. This is more likely to sustain learning efforts over time to attain language-learning achievement. Hence, teachers need to know how to aid their students to move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivational orientation (Spaulding 1992). Teachers also have to consider psychological and social factors which affect the students. Personal beliefs and attitudes of both teachers and students are also crucial. Consequently, the teacher can teach more effectively and inspire the students to learn successfully.

Students' learning strategies are determined by external factors such as task requirements, teacher expectations, teaching methods and assessments. Self-motivation is an internal factor and is highly crucial (Oxford & Nyikos 1989). Biggs (1993) and Entwistle (1988) described strategies with motivation. Firstly, there are learning strategies related to instrumental motivation. For instance, passing a course involves limiting the effort to focus attention on literal aspects of a task and the requirements of the syllabus.

Secondly, intrinsic motivation is related to strategies which focus on meaning and studying independently. Here, a student has to relate the subject to other elements in one's knowledge and experience. Thirdly, strategies associated with the achievement of motivation including organizing time and effort to accomplish tasks that will enhance the student's ego. Thus, the teacher has to facilitate learning and be aware of motivation and strategies.

It is evident that different students will have different motivation. Students can be categorized into children, adolescents, adult beginners, adult intermediate and adult advanced students etc. Generally, children require constant change in activities and they cannot sit still and concentrate for long. Adolescents may be the most interesting to teach for they may be less inhibited and more enthusiastic. However, this may present problems for they need to be seen in good light by their peers. Peer approval is vital. As a result, a teacher has to plan lessons well and carry out the tasks and activities effectively. Proper planning, teaching techniques, assessing students, and suitable teaching materials are all important issues for the teacher. Apart from motivation and learning strategies, students will definitely be more motivated if lesson games and drama activities are introduced in language teaching.

1.2 Physical Conditions

Students' motivation is affected by physical conditions. The atmosphere in which a language is learned is important. Badly-lit classrooms, classrooms without fans or with inadequate furniture can be de-motivating for students and teachers. Thus, if a teacher is confronted with the problem of negative physical condition, then he has to include language games or drama activities to inspire students to learn English.

1.3 The Teacher

For class management, the teacher must be aware of his various roles (Harmer 2003). As a controller, the teacher is in charge of the class and controls what the students do. His objective is to encourage the students to write, listen or speak well. He has to be an assessor to evaluate the students' performance. As an organizer, he has to make sure that the activities for the students are successful. The teacher has to be the prompter to enable shy or weak students to speak or write.

The qualities of a competent and committed teacher are vital. He must make his course interesting, teach good pronunciation, make sure all students participate, use an audio-lingual method or eclectic approach, and exhibit great patience. The eclectic approach is defined as "an approach which adopts any technique or procedure, so long as it ensures successful learning" (Hubbard 1987, p. 327). The teacher must also be fair and treats his students equally. He must offer a good model as the target language user. Besides, being a good technician is necessary. His students have to understand what is required from them, be able to pronounce words properly and be stimulated in the activities. Characteristically, the teacher must be a good model as a speaker of the target language and assess the students' abilities. Hence, the latter is faced with the right degree of challenge.

2. Teaching Methods: Classroom Techniques

Generally, teachers may use the grammar-translation method when teaching. Here, students should learn grammatical rule system and vocabulary and memorize and use them when translating literature works and sentences from the target language into their mother tongue and vice versa (Kong 2011). The audio-lingual method consists of habitualizing language patterns. Knowing a language involved knowing its elements and components and being able to put them into use through all language skills (Dabaghi & Goharimehr 2011). Mechanical drilling of speaking correctly may become boring when one does practice exercises. Teachers must endeavor to be innovative and stimulate interest for language learning. Teachers frequently fall back upon a traditional classroom role of imparting knowledge about grammar rules or improving vocabulary. This is a more teacher-centered approach led by the teacher. Lecturing students may be boring. We need to diversify the repertoire of classroom procedures to encourage students' own responses and stimulate their desire to improve their reading, writing and listening skills.

2.1 Teaching through Drama

Many teachers feel that they are restricted by the conditions in schools and resort to dry teaching styles.

However, severe conditions in a learning environment must not dampen the teacher's spirit. Teaching language in a creative drama context can provide an extensive range for language activities. Krashen (1975) states that language acquisition through 'creative construction' is a situation where learning takes place naturally. An informal approach such as drama activity allows students to participate actively and achieve language acquisition (Ellis 1982). Choral reading in schools also encourages students to learn English actively. Students have to memorize words and lines and reproduce speeches.

There are benefits of drama activities. First, it increases students' self-esteem. The effective teacher can select drama activities that put students at ease. Simple role plays or writing a simple dialogue is an enjoyable activity for both weak and advanced students. Teachers do not have to correct every error the weak student makes. The shy student is encouraged to speak with another partner. Secondly, many students enjoy making dialogues whether they are in pairs or in groups. Drama activities are fun and facilitate the acquisition of meaningful, fluent interaction in the target language. Other benefits include the assimilation of a whole range of pronunciation and prosodic features in a fully contextualized and interactional manner, the fully contextualized acquisition of new vocabulary and structure, and an improved sense of confidence in the student's ability to learn English (Wessels 1992).

2.1.1 Role Play

The objective of role play is to enable students to speak confidently, pronounce words accurately, and to speak with correct intonation and expression (Ladousse 1988). A wide variety of experience can be brought into the classroom through role play. It is one of the whole collections of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students. Peer learning is also encouraged by it. Fundamentally, members of a group can act out parts in a play or a given situation. Situations can be created by the teacher or the students themselves if the latter are advanced. When students put themselves in someone's shoes and imagine how characters would react to certain real life situations, it gives them an experience that is different from mere reading or writing. Drama can be a means of understanding a range of behaviors, feelings and conflicts.

In role plays, students love reading dialogues aloud in class. They may not act well but role plays are fun. Situations for group work can be created. For instance, students can be divided into groups and talk about topics such as pollution, hobbies, movies and others. Then, they write the dialogue and submit to the teacher to be marked.

2.1.2 Miming

This is to enable students to comprehend a story or text more fully. This is useful for literature students who need to remember a plot in a novel. It can also be used to teach languages. When a teacher teaches 'procedures and processes' in class, miming can be employed. For example, a group of students can act in front of the class, to show the other students who are seated, how to borrow a book in the library. Some materials can be prepared or brought to the class. Some cooking utensils can be placed on a table and one student can show how to cook a simple dish. The other students in class will have to describe the process of cooking the dish. The audience/other students then have to describe the student's/actor's actions.

2.2 Lesson Games

All games have rules which have to be understood by the students. Games can reinforce particular areas of grammar or improve the student's vocabulary. By being involved in lesson games, students learn to improve their writing, speaking or listening skills. Some of such games are as follows.

2.2.1 Describing People

In this lesson, game hand-outs are given. Notes on adjectives and descriptive phrases are also given to students. Students have to use adjectives and sentences to describe a famous person. This person may be an international film star, a political leader or any world renowned individual. His name is not stated. The rest of the class should guess who this person is.

2.2.2 Describing Things/Objects

Students are taught adjectives, nouns, parts of speech and the tenses involved in describing things and

objects. Afterwards, each student will describe an object. The rest of the class then guess what the object is.

2.2.3 Shipwreck

Students are divided into groups of four to five persons. The students are told that they should imagine that they are on a raft in the ocean. They are all survivors of a sunken ship. Student A is the captain of the ship. Student B is the Prime Minister of a country, student C is a mother of three children, student D is a famous heart surgeon and student E is a brilliant professor. Hence, the captain of the ship has to decide to save only 2 persons because only three people can stay on the raft. Each student in each group will explain why he or she should be saved.

2.2.4 Pronunciation Game

Pronunciation is significant when one studies English language. In this activity, students are given hand-outs. They are taught to pronounce a number of words accurately. Then, each student chooses and reads a word out loud and the rest of the class identifies this word. For example, “ship” or “sheep” has to be distinguished in pronunciation.

2.2.5 Interview Survey

Interview techniques have been taught in schools and universities because interviewing is a crucial part of our everyday life. In all kinds of professions, one has to interview candidates for job vacancies, clients and people. The students are divided into pairs. Each pair of students write down five questions and the teacher checks these questions. A topic is given to each group of students. Thus, the students have to interview ten people after the class lesson. Then, they make conclusions and present their findings about a topic in class. Examples of topics are the eating habits of university students, the problems of their friends or nature conservation. The teacher has to guide them on how to present their findings to the class.

2.2.6 Ten Questions

This game can be played in class or as a social game in parties and homes. One student or person is asked to stand up. He thinks of a famous person. Then, the rest of the students or people ask questions, for instance, “Is this famous person male?” or “Is he from Britain?” The person who is standing can only answer “Yes” or “No”. Only TEN questions can be asked by the other students to find out who the famous person is.

2.2.7. Alphabet Game

This is a vocabulary game. The teacher can ask students to keep an exercise book for improving vocabulary. Table 1 indicates a sample of such exercise book.

2.2.8 Where is the Other Half?

Its objectives are:

- to promote the skill of asking questions,
- to create a sense of confidence among the students,
- to learn to act and respond fast, and
- to practice making sentences.

Vocabulary building and making sentences are the language components which are practiced here. Moreover, speaking, listening and reading are the practiced language skills. This activity which is done individually involves an interactive and communicative approach. This will encourage intermediate students of English language to improve their vocabulary. The teacher prepares cards or papers with a written word or sentence that have been cut into two. For example: *uncon/scious* or *impuls/ive*

The procedure is in this form that the teacher gives each student a piece of cut card. Then, the student walks around the class and finds the other half of the card. After finding the correct half, the student knows the word. Finally, the student writes the new words in his vocabulary book. The variation can be met as the beginners can be given easier words and intermediate and advanced students are given more difficult words. Synonyms, antonyms, adjectives, verbs and other parts of speech can also be explained and given to the

students. Sentences can also be given. These sentences are written on cards and cut. For instance:

- *While George was watching television/*
- *the bell rang.*

3. Conclusion

Using drama activities and lesson games can enliven the classroom atmosphere. Teachers need to devise activities to help students acquire the confidence to develop, express and value their own responses. A great deal of our learning comes from play instead of being forced to learn or study. Role play activities in drama and games help to generate a richer learning experience in students. More significantly, language acquisition takes place naturally. Studying English is different from learning factual subjects such as Mathematics. Learning a language is more interesting and drama encourages brainstorming sessions, speech abilities, literacy and self-esteem. Vocal students learn leadership skills, organize group work and lead their group members in role plays. Shy students are encouraged to speak aloud when they are supported by their group members. More importantly, the creativity levels of our students are boosted. As a consequence, a balanced activities approach (Harmer 2003) has a more human aspect which is bound up with concerns of intrinsic motivation. A variety of activities in the classroom can ensure the students' continuing interest in learning English language.

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Table 1. Sample of Exercise Book

Names of people	Names of countries	Names of fruits and flowers	Names of Professions	Names of creatures
Alan	Algeria	apple	auditor	ant
Betty	Burma	berry	beautician	bee
Carson	China	cherry	cashier	caterpillar

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