

Effects of Peripheral English Learning and Creating Motivation on Iranian Secondary School EFL Learners of Elementary Level

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to shed light on how peripheral learning can help Iranian EFL secondary school students of elementary level. This paper elaborates this concept by considering additional aspects of peripheral learning (learning by elements other than the text itself. Elements like pictures, physical actions and gestures) and how it motivates students to learn English. The research is performed on a group of learners of elementary EFL in Razi English Language Institute at Gonbad-e-kavus, Golestan province, Iran. The results show that peripheral learning has significant effects on English Learning and creating motivation on these learners.

Keywords: Peripheral learning, pictures, physical actions, gestures, motivation

1. Introduction

During recent decades we have used traditional ways of teaching English in schools and secondary classes. Generally, learning English in schools starts before learner's age of puberty. Also, most of Iranian children participate in secondary English classes early before age of 10. In most of the classes English is taught traditionally. In schools, learners are presented with a book and they are supposed to memorize new words and learn grammar used in text according to structures elaborated by the teacher. In secondary schools, most of the books are originally American and order of presenting different sections and parts depends on the selected book. Again here we have touched the same experience of focusing on words and grammar at the expense of other parts. The main attempt is to teach learners new words and structures so that, the ability to make correct sentences can be met. But this is not the whole story; paying too much attention to some special parts will fade the importance of other ones. We know that the main reason of learning a language is to communicate with people whose language we are learning or fulfilling a job of which ultimate success cannot be met until we become able to communicate through that language.

Sometimes we transfer meaning through the ways other than using grammar structures and words. Gestures, physical actions and body language are some ways which lead us to communication. Teaching a learner how to transfer her meaning through gestures and movements is a different way which can be taught simultaneously with the main material and which proceeds communication. Consider a situation that one wants to say something but can't find the word or related structure. At this time, benefits of gestures and body language come to surface which most of the time is the first way come to one's mind. To push the story further, what if we clarify the text to learners by using gestures? Is it not true that there is a link between something we see and the same thing we have in mind?

Here, focus on learning structures and memorizing new words shift toward the way which leads one to communication. In other words, communication cannot be met just by knowing vocabulary and grammar and one should go to another pass to take the floor.

As a rule of thumb, focusing on text and reading between the lines is a traditional way of learning a lesson. But learning can also happen indirectly and with less attention to the learning process. This means that a person can learn from the environment. i.e. she can learn peripherally. Peripheral learning here means learning through the ways other than reading the text itself. This can include pictures which are used intentionally or unintentionally in the environment, physical action and gestures.

To clarify the ideas here I have done a research on a class of secondary school elementary students of English Language in Razi Language Institute in Gonbad-e-Kavus, Iran. The course book was INTRO₂ and related work book. Also, they were presented with an additional story book. Here I'm going to elaborate ways of peripheral learning used in this class.

1.1. Pictures

In each session they were supposed to read whatever they had learnt in previous session and prepare voluntarily a handmade picture related to course book and according to new words or sentences or culture or other interesting parts learnt in lessons. They should come in front of students and play role of the teacher for some minutes and teach her classmates what she had prepared. Then the handmade picture had been attached to classrooms wall and the student had been offered a star by the teacher.

In learning conversations, after explaining them in detail, teacher asked students to memorize them for proceeding session. Students were asked to prepare handmade faces related to conversations voluntarily and do their best to perform them excitingly.

1.2. Physical Actions

Students were supposed to read certain pages of the story book in home by themselves and elaborate on them in the class one by one. This helped students to rely on themselves rather than the teacher in understanding meaning. Then, students explained whatever they had understood in each line and page. In explaining scenes to be more touchable to learners, teacher or one of the students performed it physically. (e.g. *Police Officer stood by the window and put his hand in his pocket*).

1.3. Gestures and Body Language

As it mentioned before, students were supposed to bring handmade pictures or new words or whatever seemed new for them in previous sessions. New words were written on one side of small sheets of paper and the answers of each were written on the other side. Students come in front of the class voluntarily and show each word to her classmates. If they don't know the meaning, it was her duty to explain the meaning by gestures and body language in a way that students become able to guess the meaning.

These procedures have been done in the class simultaneously with course book. The important thing here is that nearly all of the students were interested in performing these schedules especially hand-made pictures and faces used in conversations. Despite the fact that these performances have been planned to be voluntarily done, all of the students without exception participated during each session.

Interview

In order to find out which of the mentioned ways helped students to learn English more and which had more effect on creating motivation in students, an interview has been done. The interview simply asked students some questions about their favorite way to learn English in class considering the past course. The results are shown in the figure below.

35%	Pictures
30%	Gestures and Body Language
25%	Physical Actions
10%	Reading at Home

As you can see in the figure, in this interview students mostly prefer to learn English in class and be active learners rather than passive ones. In other words, results show us that reading at home through concentrating on the book text per se includes just 10% of the votes. So, we can say that students like to take part in different ways of learning English which seems more interesting and challenging rather than reading at home and learning the tricks of the trade on their own.

To push the story further, it seems that pictures had more effects on the learners. As it is mentioned, in most of the sessions pictures had more advocates and students used to bring handmade pictures and faces. When these pictures had been attached to the class wall, they turned to a vehicle to transfer denotations to learner's mind. This process will happen peripherally and unintentionally. This fact that one can learn English through using pictures and gestures creates motivation in learners especially when this cycle can be done by themselves. When a student see a power in herself to share what she knows and finds a right to transfer her knowledge to her classmates, this creates a sense of self confidence. Motivation feeds on this self confidence which precedes it.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to find ways to create motivation on English learners of elementary level. We know that we learn a language for an especial reason. Whatever the reason can be, communication is at the core. This need can be met by using ways of teaching that ends in self confidence and motivation. Intentional learning can be successful when it amalgamates with peripheral learning or unintentional learning. When learner is encouraged to take part in activities she like and prefer in learning, she would become eager to learn the lesson and motivation for learning can be met.

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