Helping students to escape pessimism and to become more optimist in ELT classes

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Abstract

Optimism always helps people to become more powerful and happier. Due to the obstacles in life conditions, people sometimes feel themselves weak and unhappy. When they feel themselves unhappy, it is difficult for them to focus on their studies or on their business lives. Learning optimism can help all people to make better decisions. It also helps our students to motivate themselves and to learn their lessons happily. This study deals with optimism and learning happiness in ELT Classes. Useful websites, inspirational quotes and the ways of thinking positivity will be handled. Useful videos and books will be suggested.

Keywords: useful websites; inspirational quotes; useful books and videos.

1. Introduction

Students struggle against lots of problems in the real life conditions and they sometimes have difficulties to motivate themselves to learn new things and a new language, although they have lots of professional skills. Happiness and optimism bring lots of new challenges to life and to education. In the recent years, many new approaches and methods have been used in language classes heartily with the help of optimism and the happiness theories. This study aims to help learners to be more optimist and positive while they are learning a new language.

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2. Theoretical background

2.1. Increasing optimism and hope

Increasing optimism and hope in all areas of life is essential and inevitable. As Peterson & Seligman (2004: 570) state that

“Hope, optimism, future mindedness, and future orientation represent a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance toward the future. Thinking about the future, expecting that desired events and outcomes will occur, acting in ways believed to make them more likely, and feeling confident that these will ensue given appropriate efforts sustain good cheer in the here and now galvanize goal-directed actions.”

According to a new scientific study, positive details can hardly be seen right before lunch. (Achor, 2013: 44). Therefore it is not a good idea to talk about some serious issues right before lunch.

According to some studies, children actually learn much of their pessimism from their mothers. Criticisms which are made by adults also affect them. Thus parents should pay attention to their attitudes and their behaviours while they are growing up their children, because their attitudes are essential in the natural course of their children’s emotional growth. (Seligman, 2006: 235-236).

The quality of our relationships can be improved, if hope and optimism are grounded. Our success increases and our dreams can come true, if this improvement can be done. (Ben-Shahar, 2012: 91).

2.2. Finding Positive meaning and dispute negative meaning

Finding positive meaning can always be possible. Most of the situations which are faced in life are not very bad or awful. Therefore there is always an opportunity to find the good and the positive meaning. Although positivity does not delete negativity, it brings positive ways to life. Meanings are the interpretations of the sense which our current circumstances are made of. (Frederickson, 2009: 182-183)

2.3. Listening to positive outliers

Listening to positive outliers can help people to escape pessimism and to become more optimist. According to the recent studies, the quickest way to high achievements is not a single-minded concentration on work. Happiness and optimism move lots of people to a higher place. Listening to students, learning their habits, learning what makes them tick and what we can learn from their experiences and stories to apply to our own lives can also help us to become more positive and optimist. (Achor, 2010: 15-16).

2.4. Learning from painful experiences and happiness boosters

Ben-Shahar (2010: 25) states that

“True happiness involves some emotional discomfort and difficult experiences, which some self-help books and psychiatric medication attempt to circumvent. Happiness presupposes our having to overcome obstacles.”

It should be remembered that going through difficult times can increase the capacity for pleasure. It also reminds us to be grateful for the large and the small pleasures in our lives. (Ben-Shahar, 2010: 26). Meaningful and pleasurable activities can help people to change their general states. One or two happy experiences can help to change the unhappy periods in our lives. These experiences can be called as happiness boosters. These activities can bring us lots of benefits which make us happy. (Ben-Shahar, 2010: 189).
3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 60 university students at Dokuz Eylül University in the city of Izmir, Turkey. Their ages ranged from 19-22.

3.2. Procedure

The participants were asked to reply to the following questions during their lessons:

1. Do you think it is always possible to learn the new chapters of your coursebooks quickly?
2. Do you think you are always happy while learning the new words on your books?
3. Do you think listening to music can make you happier while studying your lessons?
4. Do you think using and learning quotes can make you happy or happier while learning new things?
5. Do you like using the internet and how often do you use the internet to practice English?

According to the answers of the above questions, class activities were applied in different classes. In a class, students were asked to bring quotes and in a different class students were asked to bring photos and pictures to do some class activities.

3.3. Materials

Sample quotes which were used to increase my students' speaking skills

A quote to be Hopeful and Optimistic (Ben-Shahar, 2012:91):
You see things; and you say, “Why?” But I dream things that never were; and I say, “Why not?”
- George Bernard Shaw
Recognize when good enough will do (Ben-Shahar, 2012: 156):
Settle for a choice that meets your core requirements rather than searching for the elusive best.- Barry Schwartz
Bring positive energy wherever you go (Ben-Shahar, 2012: 174):
Wherever you go, no matter what the weather, always bring your own sunshine. - Anthony D’ Angelo
Focus on Successes (Ben-Shahar, 2012: 265):
Wherever your attention goes, your energy flows and life grows.- Brian Bacon
Love the Life You Live (Tichio, 2012: 55):
Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.-Albert Einstein.

Sample books which can be used during the class hours

Tichio, J. (2012). Greatest Inspirational Quotes: 365 days to more Happiness, Success, Motivation. Lexington, KY: USA.

Sample websites which can be suggested to the ESL students

Popular Quotes: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes
The Quote Garden: http://www.quotegarden.com/
Wisdom Quotes: http://www.wisdomquotes.com/
3.4. Objectives

- To give students the chance to practise English as much as possible
- To teach students how to become more optimist while studying their English courses
- To teach them how to use and pronounce the new words effectively
- To teach them some quotes to create more joyful class hours
- To teach students how to use the internet for their ESL studies effectively
- To teach students new words on gestures which could be useful in the global world

4. Findings

4.1. Students’ attitudes

All the students in my classes were very active and bright students. They were interested in learning English as a second language and they were interested in developing their language skills. All the students in my class accepted learning and using gestures in the global world would be useful and enjoyable for their professional developments. They liked learning the quotes which gave them positive energy during the class hours. They also liked using the internet and the google for their studies.

4.2. Students’ Perceptions

All the students found the experimental tasks very useful and they realised that they improved their language skills. They brought their quotes, pictures and photos regularly and informed me that their interests and motivation increased day by day. Their fluency and accuracy also improved day by day while doing pair work activities with their pictures and photos.

5. Conclusion

Up to here, how to help students to become more optimist in ELT classes has been told. A research study in my classes has been explained. Sample quotes, books and websites have been suggested. This paper proposes that the effect and the reflections of happiness and optimism always help the students to study their lessons more effectively and help them to be more successful. Hope this study will help all language students to become more optimist in their class hours. It is also hoped that this study will help colleagues to do more enjoyable classes.

6. Discussion

6.1. Discussion questions for teachers or professors

1. Do you think optimism helps students to become more enthusiastic and active in ESL classes?
2. Do you think the optimist students are more successful than the other students?
3. Do you use pictures and photos to make your students more optimist and positive thinkers?
4. Do you think using quotes can make your students more active in your classes? Why? Why not?
5. Do you have pessimist students in your classes? Are they always pessimist? Why?

5.2. Discussion questions for students

1. Do you think you will be very successful if you attend the classes at school regularly?
2. Do you like learning quotes will make you more active in your classes?
3. Do you think you will be more successful, if you are an optimist learner? Why?

4. Are you a pessimist learner? Why? Why not?

Acknowledgements

This study was done at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir in Turkey. I would like to thank Assist. Prof. Dr. Kadim Öztürk and Assist. Prof. Dr. Uğur Güven, the heads of the departments of the School of Foreign Languages at Dokuz Eylul University for giving me permission to do this study.

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