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A study of teachers’ strategies so develop students’ interest towards learning English as a second language

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Abstract

Teaching English as a second language is a quite complex task for a teacher. Language learning should be more fun and enjoyable for students to learn. Teachers need to have effective teaching strategies in order for students to grasp better in learning English. It is important for a teacher to facilitate students’ interest towards learning the English Language. The objective of this study is to investigate teachers’ strategies on how to attract students’ interest in learning English as a second language. Survey questionnaires are distributed to English Language teachers and year 4 students in a few primary schools in Brunei Darussalam. From the findings, there are a few strategies that were mostly applied by teachers in developing students’ interest towards English language learning such using ICT, music and media. As for students, they are more preferred to learn English with the support of using computer and music. With the findings, hopefully teachers will be able to stimulate more students’ interest and enhance academic achievement in learning the English language.

Keywords: English language; primary education; strategy; interest.

1. Introduction

All students come from different backgrounds with unique academic needs, culture, language, interests and attitude towards learning. Teachers are trying as hard as they could to meet students’ needs in their learning.
Teaching language is a complicated task for teachers and the right techniques and strategies are needed to deliver effective language learning especially in English.

English language is one of the main languages widely used all over the world. It is very important for teachers to be able to teach and arouse students’ interest in following the lesson in the classroom. For some students, learning English as a second language is one of the most difficult subjects they have learnt. Due to the difficulties in learning, English language can make students lose their interest easily. Interest is one of the strongest motivations for learning English. Motivation has long been identified as one of the main factors affecting English language learning (Gardner, 1985). Parsons, Hinson and Brown (2001) define motivation as an important component or factor in the learning process. Learning and motivation have the same importance in order to achieve something. Learning makes us gain new knowledge and skills and motivation pushes us or encourage us to go through the learning process (Wimolmas, 2013). Ellis (1997) stated that as teachers, we need to explore more fully the factors that are involved in motivating students to perform tasks well because this is something that teachers have some control over. Therefore, it is important to find out the underlying possible factors in which affect students’ motivation and interest in learning English (Wimolmas, 2013).

This study was conducted to investigate the strategies that teachers have used to arouse students’ interest in learning the English language as their second language in the primary schools. Hopefully from the study, teachers will be able to identify the right strategies to boost students’ interest as well motivation in learning English effectively.

2. Objective of the study

This study examined on types of primary schools teachers’ strategies to attract year four students’ attention and interest towards learning the English language. This study also investigated reasons why students tend to lose interest in learning English as their second language.

3. Research questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the strategies used by the teachers in teaching English language to students?
(2) How to develop students’ interest in following the English lesson in the classroom?
(3) Why do students lose interest in learning the English Language?

4. Methodology

Since this was a small scale study, survey questionnaires were disseminated to both teachers and students. The questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaires mainly examined the strategies used by the teachers in teaching the English Language, ways of arousing students’ interest and reasons why students lost interest towards the English Language.

5. Participant

The participants of the study were year four students in which consisted of 45 students and two English language teachers in two of the primary schools in Brunei. There were two classes involved in the study.

6. Results and discussion

There were 45 survey questionnaires distributed to year 4 students in the two primary schools. Survey questionnaires were also distributed to the two English language teachers.
6.1. Students

The questionnaire contained 3 statements in which the students were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed. These statements produced information on students’ opinions in three categories: (a) teachers’ strategies in teaching the English Language, (b) students’ interest in learning the English Language, and (c) learning the English language as their second language.

a) Teachers’ strategies in teaching the English Language

There were 90% of the students who strongly agreed that they liked their teachers to make use of ICT and music to support their language learning whereas 10% disagreed to using ICT. According to some of the students, they liked learning English using ICT because it was fun and enjoyable, and they were able to understand the lesson quite well. They further stated that the use of ICT has made learning English easier. Additionally, they seemed to prefer having their lesson in the computer lab as they could easily access the computer individually or in groups especially in finding information in which they are required to search from the internet. Whereas, few students did not like learning English using ICT because it could cause confusion and they were not able to follow the lessons easily.

b) Students’ interest in learning the English language

Most students (66.7%) agreed that they liked and were interested to learn the English language and 33.3% of students did not show interest in learning the language. Some of the students did not show any interest in English because they had difficulty in understanding the teachers’ instruction especially in creating sentences using the correct grammar. The students also did not have any idea on what the teachers have said to them. The students also were lack of motivation from teachers and parents. Motivation has an important role in success and failure in learning a second language. Spolsky (1990) stated that motivated students are likely to learn more and learn more quickly than students who are less motivated. In a particular learning situation, students who are less motivated are likely to lose their attention, misbehave and cause discipline problems (Wimolmas, 2013). On the contrary, Wimolmas (2013) stated that students who are more highly motivated will participate actively and pay more attention to a certain learning task or activity.

c) Learning English as a second language

There were 56.7% who found that learning English as their second language was fun and they wanted to learn more. Most of the respondents are higher achiever students and show more interest in learning English. However, 43.3% felt that the English language is difficult to understand and they disliked the subject. Some students mentioned that they had no interest in learning the English language.

6.2. Teachers

The questionnaire for teachers consists of four statements of their opinions and views on: (a) strategies that teachers used in teaching English, (b) how they can develop students’ interest in learning English, (c) the importance of students’ interest towards learning English, and (d) reasons why students tend to lose their interest in learning English.

a) Strategies that teachers used in teaching English

Both teachers used quite similar strategies in teaching English to students with the use of printed materials such as books, display cards and posters as well ICT to support their teaching. They showed videos or pictures using projector and used audio with students. However, the teachers mentioned that most students preferred the use of ICT and music since it can help them to focus and understand the lesson better. This also can attract students’ attention and interest in following the lesson effectively. According to Dawes (2001), ICT has the potential to support education across the curriculum and provide opportunities for effective communication between teachers and
students in ways that have not been possible before. Through the usage of ICT, hopefully students will be able to understand and learn English language easily. ICT also can be used to promote collaborative learning, including role playing, group problem-solving activities and articulated projects (Forcheri & Mol, 2000). Students are encouraged to have more interaction with each other especially where the usage of ICT will take place during the lesson. This can produce more fun and interesting lessons for students to learn. From the questionnaire, both teachers used a lot of hands-on activities in their English language lessons with students. The students also preferred the teachers to provide activities, which involved word games.

b) How teachers can develop students’ interest in learning English?

Teacher A stated that she will make sure the explanation and activities were interesting and enjoyable for students to follow. She used some demonstrations and colourful materials to support her teaching. She further stated that she often asked students what kind of activities they liked to have for the next coming lesson. For Teacher A, students’ feedback on the lesson was important for her so that she can improve her teaching as well assist her in developing students’ interest in learning English. Teacher B also stated that she used colourful materials, showed videos and provided interesting activities to support her teaching. She believed that by using those techniques she could attract students’ interest towards their learning. She also stated that her students have participated in the class activities such as role-playing and demonstration. As a result, the students showed more interest in following their English lessons. Both primary schools also held reading programs and language week, especially for the English language. These kinds of activities could help to arouse students’ interest towards the English language and at the same time can improve their academic result in the subject.

c) The importance of students’ interest towards learning English

Both teachers strongly agreed that it was important to develop students’ interest in their learning. They mentioned that students seemed to have learnt quite well if they were able to show interest in their learning. They also stated that interest could motivate and stimulate the students’ desire to learn English and seek more knowledge. Research has shown that factors such as positive students’ and teachers’ attitudes, which are interrelated to motivation, must be sustained for successful transfer of language learning (Finnocchiaro, 1982; Ngeow, 1998). Both English teachers provided an English corner which also consisted of a reading corner for students to read and do English language activities. Audio-visual equipment and printed materials were provided at the English corner and were used widely in the class to arouse students’ interest in English. They also stated that it was very important to set up a conducive and fun learning environment so that students would be able to learn English in a comfortable and secure environment. Krashen (1987) supported a learning situation that has a “low affective filter” whereby the learners learn to use the language in a non-threatening and fun environment. Otherwise, learners will feel uncomfortable and insecure which will further induce a “psychological barrier” to communication and learning (Littlewood, 1995). If that happens, students are not able to learn the English language effectively.

d) Reasons for the loss of students’ interest in learning English

Teacher A listed a few reasons why students lost interest in learning English. For instance, the students felt bored and considered their lessons less meaningful. They might have difficulty understanding the lesson, especially if they were low ability students and lacked motivation. Teacher B stated that some of the students disliked learning English as they found it difficult to understand, and the teaching strategies used did not match the students’ learning needs. The students also found the activities less interesting, and lack of motivation from students, teachers and parents.
7. Conclusion

Teaching English as a second language is quite a challenging task for teachers. Teachers have to find the right strategies in order for students to have interest in their English language learning. Students’ interest is one of the important elements to stimulate their learning of the English language. Hence, through meaningful and interesting activities, and the support of teaching materials, teachers will be able to attract students’ interests in learning English. It is hope that a further research study in this area will be conducted widely in the future.

References