

Teaching English to the Inspired Learners

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports an experiment in teaching English to the inspired learners. English in undergraduate classes is mainly learnt for marks in examinations. The process of serious language learning will barely start unless the reasons for not being motivated are diagnosed and remedies are found. The expected outcome is a distant dream unless the learners are motivated to learn the language seriously. Through an action research, the writer of this paper found out the reasons behind the lethargy and skillfully inspired the learners to love English language learning... Mind blogging, involving the parents, using technology, empowering learners, enhancing learner engagement, and providing the learners with the right material brought out expected results. A teacher's love for English and for his learners along with professional commitment can definitely motivate the learners. Once inspired, the sky is the limit to learning English.

Keywords: Learning English; learner-lethargy; inspiring learners; auto learning.

Introduction

Amidst the modern miracles of ICTs having the capacity to solve almost all the academic problems, the quality of learning in general and learning of English in particular in the conventional degree courses in a majority of cases is rarely satisfactory. A committed and imaginative teacher is bound to find a solution rather than get involved in the blame game. Action research approach along with teaching is essential and this has been well suggested by Ramani (2014) that the educational practitioners should be aware of their day-to-day problems scientifically, in order to find practical solutions and improve the teaching-learning process. This paper is the result of one such investigation by a dissatisfied researcher.

Lethargic learners

Learners in India study English for about

fifteen years, but they are not proficient in any of the skills the system expects. According to the UGC Model Curriculum (2001), learners from Indian universities are expected to study a certain amount of English to gain the required competence in using English language: to comprehend English texts of a moderately advanced level, certain compositional skills required in various professions, activities in English, and the literary use of English to some extent. The learners, on the contrary, care little for the skills and their sole purpose is to score marks to qualify in examinations. The researcher has been endowed with the responsibility of teaching functional English to the undergraduate learners in a conventional college for thirty-two years, and is frustrated at the poor outcome of the efforts put in. Keen observation shows that the learners no doubt

have a desire for learning English language but want to adopt short cuts and easy methods to do so. Thus the quality of learning as well as competence achieved are deteriorating fast.

Functional English classes have very large number of students, so it is very difficult to manage and make learning effective. Heterogeneity rules the scenes due to diversity in the intelligence, emotional, and energy quotient of the learners. In addition to this, the learners have varied social, cultural, financial, and linguistic backgrounds. Their basic knowledge of English language measured in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar is mixed. The faculties, in such mismatched teacher-student ratio have stiff challenges to face. Only committed teachers are able to convert their lethargic learners into passionate learners.

Need for Inspiration

There is hardly any English educator who does not blame the system and the learners for their poor engagement in learning English language seriously. Instead of joining the chorus, there is a need for taking the bull by its horns. Teaching English in India is full of challenges but also flooded with tons of opportunities (Metri, 2013). Prasad and Rao (2019), in their interesting article, mention two types of motivation: internal and external. They call it a driving force which helps to accomplish any task creatively. Due to inspiration, inner conditions such as wishes, desires, and goals, act to move in a particular direction in behaviour.

Initiation of Inspiration

Learner desensitization

Their peers, teachers, and parents have made

learning English a difficult task towards getting a good job. As a result, learners have become shy and oversensitive. Failures in English in the memory-testing examinations have created a type of fear, a phobia among the learners. Desensitization through counter teaching theory by Wolpe was adopted. To desensitize learners, they were made to handle reading material in English other than their prescribed texts. They were motivated to watch television news and use social media consciously in English. Student reading and presentation activities were also practised. They participated in different co-curricular activities and wrote for the college annual magazine.

Involvement of parents

After convincing the parents about the sincere efforts and the interest generated among their wards, an appeal was made to provide these learners with suitable study tools. Parent collaboration is the secret to any successful innovation because Indian parents long to see their wards speak in English. The rapport with the parents proved fruitful in equipping the learners with smartphones, English newspapers, and other extra reading material.

Empowered learners

Self-analysis (SWOC) to understand one's strengths and weakness was done. The learners were well-equipped with the right study material and some online courses. Their feedback after every activity was collected and the promotion of auto learning technique created the feeling of empowerment and aroused the passionate learner in them. They were empowered with the right amount of self-esteem and ambition to develop further.

Collaborative and cooperative learning

To overcome the problem of a large class, small groups of ten students each were made to learn together and cooperate with one another. The reading materials bought by those who could afford were shared among the poor. The leader of the group whose competence in English was better took care of their problems before the facilitator remedied them.

Learning made activity-based

The speaking and writing activities published in the *JELT* and the *ELT Voices* were practised in the class. Learning was made application-oriented. For example, while dealing with interview techniques, they were made to interview people from all strata of the society. They interviewed the people in their first or local language and the interview was translated into English collaboratively. While teaching them some written communication skills, they were made to collect the material from real life and the learners appreciated such tasks. Participative techniques like role playing, debates, and PowerPoint presentations were used. The learners who got an opportunity in the process of teaching-learning became more enthusiastic in course of time.

Technological amplification

The use of audio and video files made learning quite interesting. They were motivated to prepare slides with the help of free internet clips related to their studies. The learners noticed that they were ever ready to get involved in such activities. They were motivated to visit the sites and learn English

through online courses, too. Learning was further complemented outside the class with the help of social media and mobile learning.

The outcome

Prepared learners

The inspired learners with vision prepared themselves after their self-analysis (SWOC) and understanding their own Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges. They charted the path of their journey to learn English suitable for their career. The enhanced awareness helped in building confidence, leading to their pursuing the study of English language seriously. This aptitude with zeal was fully utilized in developing effective learning of English. Once the learners were aware of their future, they came out of their lethargy and planned everything according to fixed objectives. They were charged learners, absolutely different from their own past condition. Effective learning under such circumstances was quite easy.

Scope for innovative practices

The class full of motivated learners is like the land with porous soil where anything can be cultivated. A teacher successful in winning the hearts of the learners can develop best practices to improve teaching and learning of English. The learners fully charged were ever ready to invest money, mind, and hard work. For these motivated learners, learning was no more a hated work but an enjoyable activity. The facilitator was fully involved and went beyond all ELT methods to become an eclectic English educator.

Well-equipped learner

Once their path was chosen, the learners started equipping themselves properly. The researcher observed that the learners were equipping themselves with basic tools like dictionaries, textbooks, grammar books, and websites. Most of them utilized their mobile app dictionary. Their enhanced interest motivated them to find resources beyond the textbook and the classroom in the world at large. They even started to read extensive reading material in the form of English newspapers, magazines, and journals. Their use of the library was quite interesting to watch.

Engaged learners

The learners, who usually focus on their performance in examinations, found the entire process of learning pleasurable now. Possessing the extensive reading material made them feel proud and confident. Overcoming their hesitation, they used English with pleasure. They had dreams in their eyes, so every responsibility was meaningful to them. In course of time, their enhanced passion made them prepared learners so they started browsing the topics in advance. The learners were even found preparing their own notes, keeping in mind the entrance tests for their higher studies and the competitive examinations in future. The candidates with a lot of inhibitions turned competent and confident.

Facilitator's professional satisfaction

Once the learners were motivated to be well-equipped in learning the English language passionately, the job of the facilitator became

smooth and systematic. It was equally pleasurable to the facilitator to see the enthusiastic learners acquiring skills after skills. The attendance in the class improved naturally, making the facilitator free from the problem of marking attendance mandatorily. He could see his students participating in different competitions, further enhancing their confidence.

The scope

This kind of a motivational approach is effective for not only learning English, but can be extended to the learning of other subjects as well. The teachers are free to find pragmatic solutions to genuine problems.

Limitations of the experiment

This experiment demands a lot of time and effort on the part of the teacher. It is a matter of motivation, so the facilitator needs to display love and commitment. The faculty should be prepared to provide more than bookish knowledge. The committed faculty may face distractions from their colleagues and a few learners may not be ready to change and prevent others from changing.

Conclusion

Technology has its tremendous impact on English language teaching. Learners have everything to learn and master the language. What they need is a true zeal to learn the language and it is an opportunity to the educators to inspire the learners and provide them with the right materials. The trust deficit between the academia and the society is widening fast, and the teachers committed to their profession and ready to run an extra mile can minimize this gap. They can derive

the much-needed job satisfaction, elevating themselves in the eyes of the learners, parents, the institution, and the society at large. We, the English teachers, have greater opportunities for contributing towards nation building with the human resources proficient in English language skills. Looking at our profession with the much-needed research approach is indispensable and action research is a remedy to many worries of the English teachers at all levels.

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1. Does this article present and/or discuss **issues that are important and relevant** to the teaching and learning of English in an ESL/EFL context?
2. Is the **title** clear, short and appropriate for the content of the article?
3. Is the **abstract** brief, clear, inclusive and consistent with the content of the article?
4. Is the **introduction** relevant, meaningful and purposeful?
5. Is the **literature review** relevant to the article and focussed?
6. Does the article establish a clear **rationale** for the study and state the **problem** clearly?
7. Are the **techniques and tools** used appropriate for the study?
8. Are the **results** clearly presented and discussed?
9. Are the **findings** based on a robust analysis of the data and clearly presented?
10. Are the **conclusions** appropriate and reasonable, and linked to other studies on the topic?
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