

Proposing pair and group work activities during english lessons for first year students at university of social sciences and humanities

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Received: 20/1/2023; Accepted: 27 /1/2023; Published: 3/2/2023

Abstract: In an attempt to improve motivation of students in pair work and group work activities at University of Social Sciences and Humanities, this study aims to find out (1) the causes of low motivation in pair and group work activities and (2) ways to improve the students' motivation in pair and group work interaction. To achieve the goals, an action research was carried out with participation of students at ESSH. Initial data was collected from classroom observations, questionnaires and instructional material analysis. The data were analysed for the causes of low motivation and interest among the students. The findings confirmed the hypothesis and showed a significant improve the students motivation and interest in pair and group work interaction.

Keywords: Action research,; first language, second language, pair work, group work

1. Introduction

The importance of learning English cannot be understated within the present context in Vietnam. For high school students, English is compulsory for the Final Examination. With major changes in methodology of language teaching, especially as communicative language teaching (CLT) is taking the lead in many countries the acquisition of oral competence - the ability to make oneself understood in a foreign language - has become the most fundamental aim of any foreign language courses. With the increasing awareness of the vital role of English in the modern society and with the aim to better prepare students in a constantly growing, competitive environment, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (ESSH) has given teaching English in general and oral communication in particular great priorities. In the academic year 2022-2023, the course book High Note pre-intermediate by Rod Fricker was chosen as the course book for students .

Communicative speaking activities such as role play should bring a lot of challenges and surprises to the students which all mean fun and motivating. However, as observed in many English classes the role play is so boring with students just putting structures to be practiced and give prompts together. In information-gap activities the students look at their partner's text and write down the information without asking any questions to get the answers. The

teachers also expressed different opinions concerning the problem. Some teachers believed that the main cause of low motivation level of the students was the speaking activities themselves. Some others, however, argued that there should be nothing wrong with the activities in the book, which were designed by experienced authors in the field.

In brief, the problem of low level or lack of motivation of the students in oral practice in the English classroom is perceived as serious by both students and teachers at ESSH. And motivation is considered to be one of the main determining factors in mastering a second or foreign language as motivation to learn determines the degree of effort learners put into foreign or second language learning (Gardner, 2006; Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). From the previous discussion about the problem of low level of student motivation in interaction activities in English language classroom, this study is aimed at finding out (1) ways to increase non- English major first year student motivation in speaking practice and particularly in pair and group work and (2) the extent to which their motivation increased when an action plan has been implemented at ESSH.

2. Research procedure

Step1: Problem identification

In the first place, the research was initiated by the practitioner and derived from a problem in the classroom, which needed to be confronted. In this

study the problem was that the researcher's group of students did not seem motivated in speaking activities in the English classroom.

Step2. Initial investigation

Step3. Analysis of collected data

Step4. Action plan intervention

Step5. Evaluation - interpreting data and drawing conclusions

To obtain information and data for the research the following data collection instruments were employed:

1. Classroom Observation

2. Questionnaires

3. Analysis of speaking activities in High Note

Pre-intermediate.

3. Major findings and analysis of the findings

3.1. Action plan implementation

The action plan was designed to tackle the issue from different prospects: captivating interests in pair and group work by changing the classroom setting, improving grouping techniques, managing the activities in a different way to build more confidence and active learning atmosphere as well as alleviating anxiety by tolerating mistakes students make.

3.1.1. Changing the classroom setting

With regard to **classroom setting**, the researcher agreed that the arrangement of thirty desks in neat rows facing the teacher's desk up front did not facilitate effective interaction in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher tried to arrange to classroom so that she could make eye contact with every student and reach each student with ease. Since the action plan was implemented the desks had been arranged in cooperative groups of four, and in U-shaped configuration.

Grouping

There are several ways to group students, and different methods of grouping students can be employed by the teacher depending on the activity. During the three weeks three different **methods of grouping** were employed. They were, giving students the choice, random grouping and selecting the groups by the researcher. Probably no one way would always be that best choice for a particular group, but all three ways were used at different times depending on the students and the activities planned to do in the classroom.

Giving students the choice: The chances were if the student were allowed to decide who they wanted to work with they would always stick to the same people. In the same way, if they could choose where to

sit in the class they would always sit in the same place. The danger with letting the students decide who they wanted to work with on activities was that it would always be the same and therefore cliques of friendship groups would form within the class. This would not benefit the group as a whole in the long run. Friends may not necessarily always work well together, so although the students were allowed to choose who they worked with at times, but they should not be let to choose all the time.

Random grouping: The big advantage of forming groups at random was that it was seen as fair by all involved. For example, when the teacher wanted to make group of five, she gave each student a number between 1 and 5. Then she asked all the number 1s to make a group, all the number 2s, all the number 3s etc.

Selecting the groups by the teacher: There were times when the teacher selected the groups herself for certain activities. The teacher may wish to mix the strong and weak students or to put all the strong students together for a specific task.

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3.1.2. Activity management

The following principles in teaching pair and group work activities were worked out.

Pronunciation work: The teacher always carried out some pronunciation practice of expressions provided to ensure that the students could feel confident using them in conversations. Accuracy was the focus with modeling from teacher, class and then individual practice.

Setting a goal or outcome: The teacher should make sure the students understand what the product of the role play should be, whether a plan, a schedule, a group opinion, or some other product.

Using of role cards: The teacher prepares role cards prior to the lesson and gives each student a card that describes the person or role to be played.

Brainstorming: Before starting the role play, the teacher has students brainstorm as a class to predict

what vocabulary, grammar, and expressions they might use.

Keeping groups small: Less- confident student will feel more able to participate if they do not have to compete with many voices.

Giving students time to prepare: The teacher lets students work individually to outline their ideas and the language they will need to express them.

Acting as a resource, not a monitor: The teacher stays in communicative mode to answer students' questions and does not correct their pronunciation or grammar unless they specifically ask her about it.

Doing linguistic follow-up: After the role play is over, the teacher gives feedback on grammar or pronunciation problems she has heard.

3.1.3. *Taking a correct attitude toward mistake correction to create supportive learning environment.*

The researcher is well aware that it is hardly surprising that language students make mistakes, given the difficulty of the task of comprehending, processing the content of the message and knowledge of the target language, and coming out with a response that is both grammatically correct and appropriate to the situation.

It is generally agreed that correction is part of the teaching/ learning process, but that over-correction and poor correction techniques can be demotivating for the learner and may lead to a reluctance to try out new language or even to speak at all. Using more natural approaches such as asking clarifying questions, rephrasing the statement in the correction have also been viewed as effective and positive means of addressing the issue of errors and more importantly, for the purpose of this discussion, are less intimidating for students.

Correction offers a practical way to remind the class as a whole of the language. This is in preference to interrupting a group's flow in a role play, interview, or presentation with on- the - spot correction, which then won't even benefit other groups.

3.2. *Changes through data collected from Post - lesson evaluation*

At the beginning of the study pair and group work activities were carried out in a traditional manner with teacher centeredness, and without much changes in the classroom physical layout or teacher's instruction as well as modified learning activities and tasks. Especially all the activities and tasks were carried out as instructed in the course book without much efforts and preparation from the teacher and students.

However, after the action plan intervention was carried out with a lot of effort from the teacher, the organization of selected pair and group work activities were judged by the students as very appropriate (37.9%-41 responses) or appropriate (46.3%-50 responses). The teacher's instructions in the classroom were also assessed positively by the students: 52% (57 responses) of the students found the teacher's instruction clear and 37.9% (41 responses)- very clear. No one found the teacher's instructions confusing or very confusing. There were significant changes in the results concerning the teacher's feedback and mistake correction. Before the action plan intervention nearly half of the students (48.1%) reported that the feedback and mistake corrections from the teacher were either useful but not encouraging or encouraging but not useful. During the action plan lesson 62% (67 responses) of the students commented that the teacher's feedback and mistake corrections appropriate.

Before the action plan intervention was implemented the students had negative feelings about their English learning experiences such as complaining about being book-bound. After the implementation of the action plan all the students agreed that English lessons started to become enjoyable, after the number of activities and tasks used in class increased the students found more chance to speak and interact. Also the students agreed that they benefited from the lessons.

4. Conclusion

In brief an action plan was designed and carried out. The evidence of improvement was observed during the three weeks of the action plan implementation. And the data about the changes was collected again through lesson observations and questionnaires. Finally an evaluation of the AR was made by comparing the initial stage data and post stage data. The results seem to support the researcher's hypothesis about the positive relationship between teacher's motivational teaching practice and students' motivated behaviour in the English language classroom.

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