



Doha Independent Secondary School for Boys
English Department
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ACTION RESEARCH

EFFECTIVE WAYS OF TEACHING/LEARNING WRITING SKILL

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Action Research was carried out between late November and March 2009, by Dr. Saleh Abu Nahlah and other colleagues in Doha Independent Secondary School for Boys. This first part was descriptive information. The remaining parts are intended to illustrate the possible development of an action research project

Abstract

Though the main aim of this action research has been to find out an effective way is to learn English as a foreign language and what factors contribute to succeed in language learning and increase the students' ability in writing. Students are often off-task and not using time efficiently, although they know the grammatical rules and lexical items of language. Most of the students were not able to write in an acceptable manner.

This action research, we developed a large set of language proficiency measures, an extensive student' questionnaire and a teacher's questionnaire as well. A total of 150 students have been asked to respond to this questionnaire. There were semi-structured questions for teachers. All together tend to seek information about the students' views of their own needs. The aim was to cover as many aspects of learning/teaching process and ways of motivation that entice students to participate and get involved in the class as we could.

As an English language teacher, I always think how I can provide my students with effective and interesting teaching. To me what really important is, understanding, not only knowledge. The word **understanding** contains several meanings like explanation, interpretation, perspective, self knowledge etc and if a person has clear understanding on anything, he or she can apply that, both literally and practically. That is why; I always give emphasis on understanding. But at the same time, the message that always is that I have to create true and sustainable atmosphere for my students so that they can feel free, comfortable and interested to '**Understand**'.

Areas of Concern/Stating the Problem

Students are often off-task and not using their time effectively, or “being stuck” and not knowing what to do next. I myself aware of this problem as it is described as a complex set of skills and demanding art for native and non-native students alike. I always try to create a positive atmosphere most of the time in my classes because it acquires many skills that go into writing, from the command of the mechanics of spelling and the formal rules of grammar to the logical organization of ideas and evidence. When I collected the self-v-review that was filled in by students, I noticed that many of them did not have the strategies or tools they need to proceed in writing or reading., which I have noticed my self while observing the students reading for details, speaking to communicate, or convey a given message; they ask a lot about words they do not know or words they need to use. Therefore, I began to go through my own materials that I had collected in training sessions and look for good strategies for teaching vocabulary, writing process, and classroom management. Bearing in my mind, it is important for people to take responsibility for their learning and productivity in order to be positive contributors in and outside the classroom. What could I do as a teacher to help students develop the skills they need to take responsibility? I have several limitations for which I practically do not get chances to create a suitable atmosphere. The reasons are:

1) **Students of mixed abilities**

2) **Students fascination and fear only to pass exams**

3) **Students lack of awareness**

All these practical, materialistic and psychological problems overwhelm me and my students and we actually don't do those activities in the classes which are essential for EFL students. To overcome all these I have to motivate my students to learn for gathering knowledge and understanding at the same time. That is why I have chosen the topic of motivating my EFL students.

Now the question arises why it is worth studying. I basically teach 11 and 12 grade students. These students already have their journey of learning English for 10 years. But due to many reasons, they always tend to set their goals only to pass. But just after passing the 11th grade, they have to sit for admission tests for affiliating with a renowned university that is why many of them took the matter seriously. Because here they need total understanding of the language. And after passing these stages they have to go through this understanding process for the rest of their lives because in the long run English is the most wanted language for developing carriers in future. So I always feel the necessity to make their understanding clear about English. But it is I who have to fight against all hindrances which I stated above and inspire my students motivated to learn, not only learn but they have to acquire it. So, I think it will be more relevant to my working with this problem of motivation.

Research Questions

- **How can expanding ideas contribute to better engagement inside the classroom?**
- **How can expanding ideas contribute to better composition writing?**

Contributing Questions

- **How can expanding techniques and ideas help students get engaged?**
- **How can we evaluate the effectiveness of using expanding ideas?**
- **How could school help?**
- **What is writing process and its application?**
- **How can ideas, techniques, and strategies help students write better composition?**
- **What techniques I can apply in classroom to attract their attention?**
- **How can promote them in sustaining their attention?**
- **What techniques they could implement at home to motivate themselves to learn EFL?**

Outcomes

- **Students will be able to expand their ideas to get engaged in classroom activities and tasks.**
- **Students will be able to participate in classroom activities.**

Strategies

- ✓ **Questionnaire to be used as a form of organizing/categorizing students' thoughts in order to identify ways of distraction and how teachers of English get them engaged. The questionnaire tends to ask for feedback on the learning difficulties they are having and their suggestions for better learning environment for most of the students.**
- ✓ **Self-review (who, what, when, where, why, and how) skills to be developed when students ask and answer all the 5 Ws and 1 H in reference to school life and parental issues. E.g. who are the characters in this story? What are the characters doing? Where are the characters? Why are they doing what are doing? How are they feeling?**
- ✓ **Writing Process. Pre-writing: Think about it. (brainstorming)**

- ✓ **Drafting: Write it down (choose & organize ideas)**
- ✓ **Revising: Make it better.**
- ✓ **Proof reading: Make it correct.**
- ✓ **Publishing: Share it with others.**

- ✓ Semi-structured Interview questions to teachers to identify and investigate their views concerning writing (techniques & strategies)
- ✓ Observation of students' behaviors.
- ✓ Samples of students work.
- ✓ Writing process rubric for evaluation.

Beliefs underlying strategies

- 1. Students need to respond to these questions on their own and be actively involved in their own learning.
- The use of **self-review** will enable students to expand and link their ideas of their background and school record.
- Semi-structured interview questions because of the many advantages it has over other methods of data collection.
- I have been using rubrics or checklist with the class that let them know exactly what they are expected to produce and how they can assess their work.

What has to be done?	How will it be done?	Who will do it?	By When?	What resources are required?	What would you accept as evidence of your resources?
<p>1. Source for picture composition:</p> <p>1 set of pictures for pre & post tests.</p> <p>2 set of pictures for teaching the strategies.</p> <p>Administer the pre-task (individually)</p>	<p>Level discussion to be chosen and aligned to curriculum standards from Semester 2 Composition Booklet.</p>	<p>Teacher of the class.</p> <p>Teacher & students</p>	<p>9 February</p> <p>Term 2 week 10</p>	<p>Samples of students' work. Semester 2 Projects.</p>	<p>3 sets of differentiated quizzes selected from students achievements teaching purposes & the 4th for pre & post tests.</p> <p>Marking of pre-test quizzes.</p>
<p>3. Planning and discussion on appropriate and pivotal questions with strategies in mind and come up challenging questions.</p> <p>(brainstorming)</p>	<p>Grade Level Meeting.</p> <p>Elicitation and consolidation</p>	<p>Grade Level Teachers.</p>	<p>25 February</p>	<p>1st & 2nd set of pictures composition from composition booklet.</p>	<p>Teacher creates hand on set of questions. Differentiated activities, & activities related to students' environment in order to meet their needs. Engagement.</p>
<p>4. Delivery of composition lesson using the graphic organizers (KWL) and questioning</p>	<p>Teachers to teach the students using the strategies discussed.</p>	<p>Teachers & Pupils.</p>	<p>Term 2. Weeks 4/5</p>	<p>1st of picture composition from Semester 2 Composition</p>	<p>Students were able to use the graphic organizer and applying writing process. (Teacher</p>

<p>techniques. (Bloom's Taxonomy.)</p>	<p>Students to attempt a set of picture composition in pairs after class discussion with the teacher. Applying writing process.</p> <p>Students to attempt another set of picture composition individually applying the steps of writing process. Under teacher supervision (Guided writing) concentrate on the process not the production.</p>		<p>Term 2. Weeks 7/8</p>	<p>Booklet.</p> <p>1st set of picture composition from Semester 2 Composition Booklet.</p>	<p>Observation) to write a good piece of composition.</p> <p>From observations and responses to the tasks, many of the students seemed to be benefit and improve their word knowledge effectively.</p>
<p>5. Students to attempt the post-test on their own</p>	<p>Teachers to administer the application of writing process.</p>	<p>Teachers & students</p>	<p>Term 2. Weeks 7/8</p>	<p>Pre-test picture composition</p>	<p>Compare and check that students have expanded their ideas using the strategies (steps) of writing process- using at least 4 question words for the introduction, each event in middle &</p>

	<p>Dialogues among teachers and shared insight and similar experiences with their grade 10 & 11 students.</p>	<p>Teachers</p>	<p>16 April</p>	<p>Pre & post-tests scripts.</p>	<p>conclusion of the composition.</p> <p>Students have shown that they are able to use graphic organizers and questioning strategy to expand their ideas and write better. They are able to submit an acceptable level of good performance, as the students work collectively. The topics and the research was appealing to their interests. The teachers were helpful and the students were correlated to teachers which foster their engagement in classroom.</p>
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Methods

I would like to take a *naturalistic* research approach to understand the meaning and nature of my students and situations why they are not successfully responding to study EFL and so my research will tend to examine objects of study through *qualitative methods*. This process will be generally interpretive in character, explaining why something is taking place, describing the quality of experience by gaining a deep understanding of the particular problem of my question. So my:

1) purpose will be: probing for understanding

Seeking solution of particular

Interpretation and analysis

2) methods will be: qualitative (words)

Multiple methods (triangulated data)

There are two main purposes for analysis: **firstly, searching for good explanations** that suit the reader's understanding, and secondly, to check again the accuracy of our explanations and test them. Herbert Altrichter et al (1993:162) stated that

"One of the purposes of analysis is to find explanations which "fit" our understanding and therefore seem emotionally plausible. The teacher searches for an interpretation of the situation which seems right to him and serves as a secure basis for action"

Both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of data are not separated from each other but, rather, are treated as complementary.

During the evaluation study, data was obtained from the participants, i.e. students and teachers.

The results of the study identified the specific areas of that needed to be strengthened and changes need accordingly. After collecting the data needed through questionnaires and interviews. The data were calculated and analysed. In this respect, qualitative data is essential. It focuses on real life problem. It analyzes words rather than numbers.

Sampling

The focus of my study will be my colleagues and my students. In choosing my subjects and process, I will focus on validity and reliability. I will consider consistency, dependability, conformability and credibility of the evidence for validity and reliability of my naturalistic, qualitative research. For these reasons my subjects will be chosen from my own institution.

Data Collection

I think I will collect data by Observation, Interviews and Samples of student work. For that I will use Figure 5-1 from the book .The power of Questions by Beverly Falk and Megan: Connecting data collection techniques with research questions:

Sub-questions	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3
How can I get students involved in classroom activity?	Observation (Students in the classroom)	Interview (Colleagues & students) close ended & open ended questions (Questionnaire)	Sample of student work. (student work)

What techniques I can apply in the classroom to attract their attention			
How can promote them in sustaining their attention			
What techniques they could implement at home to motivate themselves to learn EFL			

I will use these three types of data and will form *Triangulation* using them so that I can be sure whether the results are justified or not. Because only one evidence will not be enough for Action research. If the outcomes will be more or less same, I can assess my research a successful one. I will make some plan for collecting data, such as:

Who will collect the data?

I myself.

Where will I collect each type?

Observation

Interviews

Samples of students work.

When will I collect each type?

In the class and outside the class.

For how long will I collect?

For two months (20 days in collecting each type of data.

Organizing data

I will read and re-read all the data, make notes of anything that strikes me as significant or unusual. I will also make a list of all the main topics. Major topics and subtopics may emerge. Reflection of data collection will go side by side because these will help me to find new insights, directions and questions. I know that there is no right path for analysis. But if my research plan is coherent, the findings will be supported by evidence and then analysis of the findings will make sense. So my approach to data analysis will be *Emergent analysis*. I will do one more thing for analyzing data and that is peer work to ensure that I am organizing my data around themes which reflect everyone's perspectives and that make sense.

Ethics

First of all I will **obtain permission to conduct** the study from the operator and the general director of Doha Independent School for Boys.

I will not allow myself to publish any of my research report without the permission of the principal and vice academic principal.

I will not disclose any of my colleagues' names without their consent.

Students' interview comments and sample work will not be particularized either.

I will involve my study participants in the data analysis process to protect them and to create shared understanding.

Findings

Some of the findings of that research worth mentioning, even though I will not bother you with details but to highlight some remarkable findings. When we look at language proficiency scores, we see that students who are affiliated with any teaching education institute such as the **British Council, or ELS** show the highest score and get engaged in every activity in the mixed-ability classroom context, while students who have maids are speaking English as a second language such Pilipino ones are lagging behind only slightly, meanwhile students rural background (nomads) scored much lower. We can say that the students from poor countries such as Somalia reach fairly low level of proficiency in secondary education. In the project we also asked the students to self-review their proficiency in English. The result showed a good correlation between proficiency scores and self evaluation, but the students who applied to TOEFL, SAT, or IELTS estimated their proficiency to be higher than the students who did not any extra curricula activities or attended any other courses to learn English as foreign language. Therefore, this (and earlier research on this issue) suggests that students who studied in renowned private schools such as: Qatar Academy and Cambridge overestimate their own proficiency and boast of their assumed superior language skills. This may be a nice character trait, but may be for successful language learning it is not that bad: one thing we do know is that self-confidence and the willingness to go out and be willing to take risk in the language use has a very positive effect on language learning. So the typical apologizing American reaction, “I’m not good at language” may be part of the cause why they are not good at language.

- The new practice, i.e. writing process listed above, is working very well for the majority of the students. This semester, there are fewer discipline problem than there were in the first semester.
- The advantage of this action plan is that it frees students to take risks and responsibility for their own learning.

- I have received positive feedback from many students.

How can school help?

It is important to note that there are many environmental factors- poverty, neighbourhood, violence; family record- may contribute to the students' disengagement, but there are several interventions that school administration can implement to reduce the effects of negative outside influences and in turn encourage positive engagement in learning. (Garcia Ried & et al, 2005). Intervention such as:

1. **increasing parental involvement.**
2. **offer extra curricular activities**
3. **improve school safety may enhance student's engagement in classroom.**

Rationale

The reason everyone goes into education is to have a powerful influence on the educational lives of students. Action research helps reinforce and cement the belief that together (teachers and administrators) can make a difference.

Glickman, 1995

These words seem to me very much similar of my thoughts when I was searching for my Action research question. As a teacher I do believe that we teachers can make the difference if we are conscious and eager to do that. And if the decision makers do favor to this eager group of teachers, the school can certainly be the pioneer of change for the better. My question of this action research will be to find out the ways to motivate EFL students to learn English. I think Findings of my action research will be a great source of the

change. Action research question is for placing my problem in a larger framework and in the context of existing knowledge to see how others have explored. Many class hours I have already spent on teaching grammar but when I ask my students to say something or write something on a specific topic, most of them fail terribly to do that. Always a thought comes to me what could be the reason behind this. I find in horror that we teachers are failing continuously to motivate the students to learn English effectively. So motivation thought always comes to my mind and haunts me. So when I got this chance of Action research, I thought that it would be the best chance to find out ways of motivating students. So I have taken this question. After finishing all my research work and building my own story, I will explore it to others.

There will be many ways to share my work. I want to share, all the result as well as story of my Action research, beginning from the very small area and then expand it into large areas gradually. First of all I will organize a workshop with my other participant colleagues to show our work. I think this kind of presentation will show how to support EFL students in our school as well as other schools. Then I will submit it as a proposal to the operator & general director, principal, and vice academic principal.

Next Step

1. How can the students be motivated to complete their homework more regularly?
2. How can students become more responsible for having all of their learning at school?