

Methods of Increasing Speaking Activities in the Classroom (Maximising Student Input and Involvement)

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Abstract

This article explores methods of maximizing student participation in the classroom. The lecture method is often used especially with large classes thereby leading to 'passive'-student roles. Some teachers view communicative approaches as noisy and time wasting because syllabus coverage is crucial to an examination-oriented syllabus. Other reasons for this approach include classroom space limitation for executing interactive learning activities and students not being used to interactive learning. However, there are instructors who employ a learner-centred approach. An Attempt to promote a student-based, communication-driven approach is likely to encounter passive resistance due to their traditional learning context.

The research set out to determine methods of maximizing student interest and involvement in the classroom. It took place at Marist International University College. I conducted fifteen hours lessons in May and June 2012 applying various communicative activities. There was teacher-learner interaction. The teacher employed interaction patterns like pair, group work activities etc. These provided a perfect opportunity for all learners to communicate. The findings demonstrated that the teacher has to create a conducive environment, establish rapport with learners, elicit more, plan for appropriate and interesting communicative activities and exploit a variety of teaching resources. These actively involved learners in the learning experiences.

Key words: Collaborative, phonology, skills, facilitator, teaching, learning, elicit, communicative, interactive, activities, classroom, authentic, tasks, student, teacher.

1. Introduction

This paper sets out to explore ways of maximizing student involvement in the classroom by applying the interactive communicative method. This is a communication-driven approach that employs learning activities which promote student-based communicative activities.

One characteristic of communicative activities is to achieve the outcome that participants are required to interact by listening and speaking (Thornbury 2005).

Below are some core assumptions of current communicative language teaching/learning identified by Richards (1990). He notes that there is a need for:

- a) Interaction and meaningful communication.
- b) Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises.
- c) Processing relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging content.
- d) The use of several language skills or modalities.

In broad terms, to achieve my aims and implement Richards' pre-requisites, I will be working on three areas; types of tasks used, interaction patterns and ways of increasing motivation.

More specifically, the key aspects/features of the communicative approach I will be implementing are:

- a) Involving learners in decision making / reflecting on their own learning process.
- b) Giving responsibility to learners of carrying out a variety of interactive tasks in large and small groups in the classroom.
- c) Getting students to move out of their seats, as they carry out classroom activities.
- d) Giving learners a choice of selecting topics.
- e) Maximising student involvement through prediction activities.
- f) Improving classroom interaction through seating arrangements, grouping learners and being aware of the teacher's position.
- g) Maintaining high levels of interaction through classroom layout and appreciation of action zones.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this work is to focus on ways of maximising students' opportunities to speak in class. The main objectives are:

- 1.1.1 To experiment with a series of techniques designed to allow students to bring their own interests and experiences into classroom interaction.
- 1.1.2 To investigate the effects of different collaborative interaction patterns (pair/group discussion-

work) on learner participation in the classroom.

- 1.1.3 To experiment with techniques/ strategies that require students to work together in order to accomplish task goals.

1.2 Rationale

Interactive communicative methods are not widely used in some contexts, because the lecture method is often used especially with large classes. From experience, most students expect to play a traditionally 'passive' role, with the teacher leading. This also applies to advanced classes at University level and even high school. On the contrary, there are instructors who conduct interactive lessons by employing a learner-centred approach. On the whole, however, some students are not used to communicative approaches and levels of spoken interaction are accordingly low. Any attempt to promote a more student based, communication-driven approach is likely to encounter some passive resistance until clear benefits become apparent.

Williams (2011) observes that child-centred education is assumed to be the norm in state systems in rich countries, especially the English-speaking ones. He also notes that there is ample research to suggest that in much of sub-Saharan Africa the teaching is largely teacher dominated. It is pointed out that children in a teacher-dominated class do not understand the teacher or textbooks; there is no attention to the presentation or checking of meaning in reading classes. Rote-repetition of written text without comprehension is a 'reading-like' activity, but not reading in the sense of cognitive engagement with text. Similarly, copying from the blackboard without comprehension is 'writing-like' but not 'true' writing.

It is useful to reflect on my own learning experiences of English as a foreign language by considering how I was taught and how I responded as a learner before starting to think of my own role as a teacher. In reflecting on my experiences of learning English and Kiswahili from primary school up to university level, I will touch on two key factors, the suitability of the teaching methods employed and the learners' mindsets.

On teaching methods, teachers largely employed the Grammar-Translation method which is a very traditional approach with a number of drawbacks as discussed below. The uniform application of traditional approaches meant an emphasis on rules, translation, repetitive oral/pronunciation drills, vocabulary accumulation and memorisation. The consequences were dull and boring lessons, less attention to language function and meaning, few opportunities to productively use the language, and a bias to the more academic students or those who were more inclined towards a 'rules-based' learning style.

There was too great an emphasis on reading and writing skills to the detriment of the acquisition of aural and verbal fluency. This is also quite a common occurrence at secondary/high school level where written coursework and examinations dominate the curriculum and determine progress and advancement. Teachers, too, are much influenced and affected by this but, again, the very best and committed educators find ways of balancing effective language learning and assessment requirements.

New language was presented and practised unimaginatively, largely through the textbook but also through monotonous and mechanical audio-lingual drills. The approach and interaction in the class was almost totally teacher-directed, with the learners being passive recipients of knowledge about the language. The teachers' attitudes and overall approach stifled any opportunities for interaction and fluency that the course and its material might have offered. Teachers operated very rigidly and formally in the classroom – the arrangement of desks, all activity being teacher-directed, a prescribed and strict form of behaviour for students, close adherence to the textbook with a very overt focus on tests and examinations. Some teachers were also quite harsh and uncompromising in their relations with learners. More traditional methods – grammar-translation, the audio-lingual approach, behavioural methods, etc. – saw mistakes and errors as an obstacle to learning and something which had to be addressed immediately and very directly, and 'eradicated'.

Despite trying to use a communicative approach to teaching, some learners, due to their traditional learning context, will still not participate unless they are nominated to talk; hence the need to identify a varied range of specific techniques and strategies that can be used to maximise student input.

This work thus sets out to experiment with different participatory and creative ways of teaching. Through these activities learners will peer teach and hopefully be motivated to use the language.

Three key considerations will influence the successful implementation of increasing learners' contributions through a more communicative approach. The first of these is an acknowledgement of learner styles. The Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Learning Styles (VAK) model distinguishes three types of learners. Firstly, visual learners who use mindmaps, colour and draw diagrams and sketches. Secondly, audio learners who read aloud, record to their ipod, discuss revision and put their notes to a tune. Finally, physical learners who move around the room and mentally revise while jogging or swimming.

2. Procedure

To conduct fifteen hours lessons at different levels based on the objectives
It is hoped that the conclusions will benefit teachers to improve their teaching.

2.1 Lesson 1

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-05-16

Class 11 students

Time: 13:30 – 15:30

Materials: Group discussions and presentations of findings.

Objectives: To improve learners' participation in the classroom; Comprehension, speaking and writing. This participation will involve students, not only in the topic, but also in making decisions on their own learning.

Techniques used: Group discussions on comparing and contrasting speaking and writing, and making presentations on findings that generate discussions.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

I divided students into groups to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of writing and speaking giving clear instructions while assigning the tasks and guiding all groups during the discussions. It promoted student interaction because they could draw on their own experiences on reading and writing hence, they freely brainstormed/discussed the advantages and disadvantages.

During the time for reporting back their findings each group member participated. The rest of the class and teacher further contributed to the presentations made. The outcome differed from normal classes because the traditional lecture method was not used and learners played an active role. Students did not just listen and take notes but generated points on their own, which was more authentic. This provided practice on grammatical and communicative competence and the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking were integrated. Seating arrangement was changed from the normal lecture routine of facing the lecturer and this created an inclusive learning environment.

In this lesson the students got involved in discussing / making decisions about their own learning / learning style preferences. Nunan (1998) notes that language programmes should have twin goals which are language content goals and learning process goals. This is particularly true at higher levels and this activity satisfied both goals.

2.2 Lesson 2

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-05-22

Class 13 students

Time: 8:30 – 10:30

Materials: Whiteboard, markers, note books, topic for debate

Objectives: To improve learners' participation in the classroom through pair/group brainstorming sessions to facilitate a class debate; activities revolved around speaking and writing.

Techniques used: Exploiting the 'formal debate' activity.

I divided the students into two groups. One group was to speak for and the other against the topic. The students' debated points in pairs, and then the pairs doubled up to fours to come up with agreed points, then to six/seven. The topic for discussion was the effect of integration of English language and literature in the teaching of English. This developed from lesson one with students reflecting on their own learning. After members of each side came together and finalised their list of points for the debate, the students carried out the actual debate. I identified the topic, which I deemed relevant to trainee teachers of English.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

I used the technique of pair/group discussions. I gave the topic of debate and divided the class into two groups; a coin was then tossed to identify the opposers and proposers for the debate topic. After identifying their tasks, I then asked them to work in pairs noting down relevant points. The pair then joined another to further agree on identified points and add more. Finally, the last pair joined them to compare their points and agree on the final list of points for the group. Each of the two groups then needed to appoint three speakers to represent them during the debate; this promoted student interaction and participation because at the pair and group level they each contributed points for discussion, as they had to come up with points to win the debate. This differed from normal classes because of active participation of all learners. Everyone said something. When it came to the actual debate further roles were given to the three/four other members. One had to be the chair to facilitate the debate, four others (two per side writing for the opposite) had to note down points from opposite sides, which were used to determine the winners and two noted down any errors to be discussed later. Every other student too noted down errors identified. This lesson developed interaction patterns through the traditional 'class debate.'

2.3 Lesson 3

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-05-29

Class 13 students

Time: 08:30 – 10:30

Materials: Poems, note books, whiteboard, markers

Objectives: To improve learner s' participation in the classroom through oral skills/speaking -identifying sound based, comparison and other stylistic devices in poetry, reading and writing.

Techniques used: Brainstorming, constructing sentences on identified aspects of style in poetry, reading aloud.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

I asked learners to identify the stylistic devices used in poetry. They were already familiar with stylistic devices in poetry studied in previous semesters in related units. They were then to give oral definitions, which I reinforced. After each definition I asked the learners to construct a sentence with the stylistic device and as many volunteers as possible read out their sentences to the rest of the class This promoted student interaction because they had to mention the aspects of style, define them, construct own sentences and read them out to the class. For each stylistic device, a student was given a relevant poem to read out as others listened to pick relevant examples. During the process of listening to poems, others wrongly named the devices and did self-correction. This enhanced mastery of content as opposed to lecturing where the teacher just mentions or gives the definitions. This worked successfully because students used their past experience to remember the definitions, identify examples from poems and even generate their own. Phonology came into play when sound devices in poetry were discussed and pairs identified; rhyme alliteration, assonance etc. I realised that there were still learners who had to be nominated to talk after these three lessons and that some of these techniques were monotonous and needed variation /a range of specific techniques and strategies to use in the different lessons. Hence, I decided to experiment in different participatory and creative ways in subsequent lessons. The positive point demonstrated in this lesson was the benefit of getting students to actually do something with their writing. The down side was that some were not interested in the topic chosen by the teacher. The obvious development is to give students more choice.

2.4 Lesson 4

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-05-31

Class 14 students

Time: 8:30-10:30

Materials: A4 size papers, flip charts, stick on papers and markers

Objectives: To further experiment (report writing) with speaking, reading and writing activities to make the classroom more dynamic/ interactive and ensuring that real communication is reflected through the use of discussion.

Techniques used: Listening, discussion, brainstorming, group work, changing positions and writing.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

This lesson maximised the student involvement as they identified types and parts of a report through, contrasting, comparing, explaining, group work, ordering, writing, correcting other groups errors and referring to life experiences while discussing changes in communication methods. This is in line with Seligson's ideas as he advises teachers not to talk for more than two minutes/too much but to pause a lot when teaching a group. He says teachers could involve learners by asking them to suggest, react, predict, compare, discuss and do demonstrations. The lesson also focused on the importance of movement within the classroom and responding to learners who have a kinaesthetic learning style. This was done through displaying flip charts, using stick ons and swapping places.

Each group had an activity to write about and to conclude. I emphasised that either should be easy to write and read, simple, accurate, brief and concise. This activity was competitive through timed brainstorming. It evoked learners' own thinking, and was challenging and time saving (inductive). The outcome differed from normal classes because it was highly participatory with learners doing varied activities, changing positions and posting their work. As Seligson (2008) notes, through group work they energize each other and weak students are taken care of during the shuffling as they learn from different groups/pairs.

2.5 Lesson 5

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-06-5

Class: 14 students

Time: 1:30 – 3:30

Materials: Flip chart, markers and note books

Objectives: To further work on allocating different tasks within the class groupings and giving students greater control over decisions affecting their own learning. Continuation of report writing.

Techniques used: Discussion: Individual, Pair and group work; speaking, reading, writing, listening, peer correction, game and movement.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

In this lesson more attention was paid to the class interaction patterns. There were lots of working in pairs/groups and correcting each other and students had a lot of control over their own learning. The lesson started with a recap of the previous lesson about clarity in writing and reading, good writing styles, use of visuals and diagrams

and how to write findings. Learners also had an opportunity to seek any clarifications. Learners discussed the contrast between conclusions and recommendations in a report. In pairs, they went through a report and wrote a conclusion. Volunteers read out their conclusions which were discussed to emphasise on summary and objectivity/facts. Learners wrote recommendations based on the conclusions and listened to a few examples. There was peer correction in instances when recommendations and conclusions were confused, this was a good technique to aid mastery. To recap on the structure, I nominated students to mention parts of a report in correct order. Different learners took the class through the check list on the flip chart as I commented on each. For practice, I gave a common question for individual report writing. This was followed by constructive criticism where learners swapped their work with partners, read and wrote comments on a separate piece of paper (peer correction). I divided the class into two groups and gave each a flip chart. Each learner in the group was to write one bad habit or more that they discovered from the individual criticism. They also indicated what was positive. All these activities promoted student interaction through speaking, reading, writing, listening and movement. All were actively involved through taking control of their own learning.

2.6 Lesson 6

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-06-7

Class 14 students

Time: 8:30 – 10:30

Materials: Flip charts, markers of different colours, sheets of paper and note books.

Objectives: To improve learner s' participation and interaction in the classroom by involving them in a variety of activities through movement/changing seating positions; speaking, reading and writing. Continuation of report writing.

Techniques used: Gap filling, pair and group work, discussion, writing, and reading

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

I asked learners to define the term executive summary by filling in gaps in groups which were later read out and wrong ones corrected. We also discussed the importance of the executive summary. The class then was divided into four groups, two groups with the same task. Each group had a flip chart and a sheet of paper with five bullet points on content and style of the executive summary. They copied this on the flip chart, on the left, in a landscape position. After copying they swapped tables and wrote, to the right, reasons for applying each suggestion put down by the previous group. These were posted on the wall and discussed. I found this activity to be participatory because just like in the previous lesson, there was a lot of interaction, correcting of each other and it was involving. The students sat, moved and did a variety of things. The activities enhanced memorisation of the tips because if the points/notes were just given by lecturing, students would not remember them easily.

2.7 Lesson 7

Level: Advanced

Date: 2012-06-13

Class: 13 students

Time: 10:30-1:30

Materials: Note books, and introductory essay sentences written on the board.

Objectives: To engage learners in motivating tasks that maximise their involvement and full participation in writing and reading activities.

Techniques used: collaborating on 'building' a task together by students writing a chain story, each predicting the next sentence and passing on the book till the plot is complete. Reading completed composition to the rest of the class. Follow up questions and correction of parts.

Evaluation of lesson effectiveness of techniques used:

On maximising students' opportunities to speak in class Seligson (2008) advocates for the use of small groups, large groups and pair work. In his videos on classroom management several ways through which classroom management can enhance participation of small and large groups are demonstrated. The participatory activities create conditions that foster learning opportunities for the majority of the class. I realised that these could further develop similar activities carried out in my previous lessons and decided to apply/experiment his principles.

I gave students a few introductory sentences and asked each group to choose one and write a chain composition. Each student was to predict/write the next sentence in the story and pass the book to the next till they concluded. I was teaching writing and to maximise student's opportunities to participate I engaged the class in this activity to make sure that everyone played an active role. I wanted the students to work a lot with/refer to their neighbours/ groups.

This was better than asking individual students to answer a specific question which would not have interested all of them and it would have appeared as though I was testing which one is/is not interesting. Good students would have finished faster than the weak ones. Seligson (2008) notes that individual work slows pace and students who finish quickly get bored and waste time doing little or nothing while the teacher interacts with one student at a time or with the stronger students at the expense of the weak. This also causes division.

This was motivating as all learners guarded against being lost. The students had to be keen to stick to the story line. They had to predict the next part up to the end. If this was not done, they would be lost during the reading out session. A few parts were off topic and this contributed to humour in the classroom. Each group read their own piece to ensure that the whole class further participated and were active. This I did through asking them questions about what they heard or to re-word some sections. Students collaborated on 'building' a task together. Failure of an individual to co-operate would result in failure of the whole task and the group would be let down. Further practice on prediction was done on approaches of extracting meaning in intensive reading. Students were to predict the theme (s) and rheme of various passages.

After trying out these participatory activities, I agree with Seligson's approach to classroom management based on enhancing participation by use of small, large groups and pair work in maximising students' opportunities to speak in class. The advantage was that all students; stronger, medium and weak got equal opportunity to participate during the lesson. Strong students did not dominate activities because the whole class was involved in the prediction. I gave students maximum opportunity and this activity maximised practice.

3. Conclusion

My understanding has developed and I have learnt several skills that I can employ to conduct participatory lessons that would make students to be successfully communicative. The following are the findings that emerged in the series of lessons. The techniques/strategies that did work and were most effective are also discussed including how they worked in practice in the context I was working in. What did not work out initially is also discussed:

Learning was active and most activities involved discussions. I realised that teachers and learners should interact by teachers giving responsibility to learners through a variety of interaction patterns like small/large group teaching, tutorials, seminars, discussions and presentations. Groups in the class can be made to carry out specific tasks that are different from other groups but that go to forming 'a whole'. I varied individual, pair and group work activities.

Another aspect of active learning also involved movement and displays of work produced; this was achieved through use of kinaesthetic 'linked' activities that involved getting students out of their seats. They did this to exchange groups/partners, present findings in front of the class or to post/stick findings/work on designated areas on walls. They also moved to write on flip charts or board. The teacher gave input where needed to encourage creativity and participation. Learners discovered much through fun and bonding which involved a lot of movement and activities.

In reading, student involvement was maximised through prediction activities. Students predicted content from the title, skimmed the text for general meaning and read the text again carefully/scanning to find the information they needed. To further develop students' reading skills, other activities carried out included students predicting then reading the text to confirm their predictions through answering written questions or discussing comprehension questions with their partners/groups or the whole class. To encourage communication, I encouraged students to compare answers and discuss how they found them with the other learners in the classroom. This interaction made reading interactive and communicative. The reading and discussion integrated the reading and speaking skills. In the author's context, there is a lot of emphasis in integration of language and literature as well as integration of the four language skills of writing, listening, speaking and reading within lessons.

With regard to maximising students' opportunities to speak in class I realised that seating arrangement, grouping of learners and the teacher's position affect classroom interaction. Classroom layout and action zones can lead to higher levels of interaction. I tried to involve all learners in the classrooms regardless of their seating position to counter the belief that teachers only concentrate on students sitting in front and in the middle of the classroom. I also noted that pair/group activities other than just the seating position provide a perfect opportunity for all learners to communicate in class as opposed to a teacher-centred lecture situation where there would not be sufficient time for each learner to even speak once to the teacher.

I learnt the importance of giving learners greater control over materials and more choices of topics. This gets them involved in decision making/reflecting on their own learning process. What did not work out for me at the beginning was that after the first three lessons I realised that there were some learners who still did not participate and had to be deliberately nominated by the teacher to talk because they were not interested in the topic chosen by the teacher. Hence, I decided to experiment by giving them more choices of topics in subsequent lessons, for example, in debate and realised that they participated more. Students participate more on topics that are related to their life experiences. The teacher has to create a conducive environment/establish rapport with learners and elicit more when teaching the four language skills to have the introvert students get involved in the

discussion.

Students should be encouraged to discuss in groups and be given constant short breaks of discussion which takes away tension. Individual and group needs should be balanced to further make learners exchange partners when doing pair work to check their understanding. This allows all to see and hear what each individual has in mind or has understood and to decide what to do next. Planning for appropriate and interesting communicative activities that will hold learner's attention throughout the lesson is a skill one needs to master.

Greater use of youtube and IWBs should be encouraged as a form of engagement to increase the focus on to activities where students are required to further express their own opinions, and share these with colleagues. Students should be made to understand the advantages/benefits of 'non traditional' classroom activities when doing advanced language study. It is important to note that teachers will use techniques/strategies that work for them as individuals and their situations because choice might be influenced by the context in which they are teaching as there could be, for example, limitations of space. These reflect the importance of creativity of the teacher in lesson preparation. A teacher should facilitate experiences that help learners practise and master knowledge and skills. Teachers should therefore exploit a variety of teaching resources that actively involve learners in the experiences as they play the facilitator role.

Fortunately, times and methods have changed somewhat since my first experience in learning English. By contrast, TESOL and modern language teachers now strive to use approaches that are more communicative, lay emphasis on participation and interaction, and attempt to meet the needs and expectations of the learners.

It is generally recognised that effective language teachers:

- 3.1 Use a collage of different approaches and techniques. These range from the more traditional audio-lingual methods to introduce the language forms and vocabulary, through integrated skills work and use of different media, to more communicative and functional interactive techniques. Teachers need to be very flexible in the methods and approaches they use so as to maximise student interest and involvement/engagement, learning experiences and positive outcomes.
- 3.2 Focus first on the teaching of meaning and, thereafter, explain or outline the form of the new or target language. Learning a language by learning the rules is rarely going to be successful. Learners need to have adequate opportunities to use the new language in meaningful ways. They do not need lots of grammar and any more rules than they need. If students get enough general exposure to language they will work out some rules for themselves. It is sometimes useful for a teacher to give students simple rules because occasionally these can guide them. However, the rules of grammar and the form of the new language should not be the starting point. Overall, teachers should try to adopt an approach that has a clear focus on meaning within a clear context, and which also attempts to balance the learning styles of the students. Language teachers need to strongly focus on meaning at all levels. In other words, teachers need to make sure that a new element of language is well taught within a clear context so that the use of that language item is very clear. For example, if we are teaching conditional sentences such as *if* + Present Simple + Future we must make it clear to the students how we use this combination (to talk about things that will happen or are likely to happen) because just teaching the form will not help them to know when to use this combination.
- 3.3 Provide opportunities for students to interact and speak the language. This is one of the main challenges that good language teachers have and many teachers encourage this behaviour through class discussions and pair work. This is a practice where a meaningful task is set and the students are asked to work in pairs, then everyone can work/speak/listen and the task can go on for five minutes or more while the teacher moves around unobtrusively listening to what is being said. The activities could involve using pictures, blank filling, dialogue practice, role-plays, quiz competitions, simple situational dramas as well as situations using a telephone. Everyone gets talking time and this is far better use of time than, for example, questioning students individually. Student-student communication is a very important element in TESOL classrooms and facilitates both student practice and monitoring by the teacher. However, working in pairs or small groups does not of course mean that the lessons will be perfect. No doubt some students will use their first language or do an activity in a casual way, so time might be wasted. The teacher needs to ensure that the tasks are carefully chosen and are appropriate, and then move around the class to check on their progress.
- 3.4 Facilitate the students' language skills practice. The ideal lesson is one that involves some listening, some speaking, some reading and some writing, integrated with some specifics of the language (vocabulary or grammar or intonation etc.). Integrating all the elements helps students to learn because students learn in different ways, and seeing the new language in different contexts helps to reinforce learning. Where the teacher can successfully integrate the four language skills the students will be able

to practise the new language in a range of different ways. If the students get the opportunity to listen and speak, and later to read and write the new language, they are more likely to remember it. Language skills go hand in hand and these skills should be practised together so that one skill helps to reinforce the other skills.

- 3.5 Present new language imaginatively and in an authentic or natural context. TESOL teachers can make the language more meaningful and relate it to life and culture of English-speaking countries by bringing in real materials (newspaper adverts, short pieces from newspapers/magazines, pictures, photos, adverts for houses, adverts from personal columns, etc) to supplement the textbook. The teacher needs to link the language to real life even with elementary students. Similarly, depending upon the resources available to the teacher and learners, the students should have the opportunity to listen to stories, to the radio, watch TV programmes, video and DVD, and to work with new communication tools – the Internet, SMS texting, blogs, etc. This will ensure that they become familiar with natural language rather than just exercises where they do rather meaningless repetition.
- 3.6 Organise the seating arrangements and the classroom to facilitate student work and foster a positive learning atmosphere. Teachers today like to work in classrooms where the desks are arranged more informally in groups or semi-circles or in pairs scattered around a room. These arrangements can make the classroom seem far more relaxing and attractive and can encourage student-student interaction. However, even today, this does not happen everywhere, and in some more traditional countries and educational systems many school teachers in primary/secondary schools (as opposed to language schools) may be unwilling to arrange their class in groups (for example) and one may sometimes find surprise and even opposition to such an approach. Teachers should not be put off if they find themselves in this situation, but should try to demonstrate through their own work that students sitting in groups can work very successfully.

The difference between positive and negative learning experiences is very often down to the teacher and his or her personal and professional qualities. Teachers need to be very enthusiastic about the target language and culture and aim to transfer this excitement to their students. The truly best teachers strive to be inspirational. Teachers should aim to be motivational and employ very many different techniques to develop learner interest and engagement. They should effectively facilitate learners' learning. Above all, teachers should be very supportive to their learners. Support is vital because learning a new language is difficult. Learners are understandably quite nervous about doing worse than their fellow students and if the teacher appears not to support all students then the classes can become unbearable. Constructive support is what is needed and good teachers will provide this for all of their students, whatever their ability level, and whatever signs of progress they demonstrate. This is one of a teacher's most important skills. Building confidence is essential in language learning and so too is humour and laughter in the classroom.

Concerning the learners, teachers often forget why students are learning the target language. As teachers of English, we need to be conscious of the language environment in which the students are living, their age, the reasons why the students are learning English (their needs) as well as (as far as possible) their learning style. A student might be learning English for various reasons such as general social reasons, to keep a middle-aged brain alert, for career purposes, because a partner has got a new job in an English-speaking country and s/he has to accompany the partner, simply because it is on the school syllabus and to pass exams among others. Motivation in the latter context – secondary or high school – can be particularly challenging. The language is one of many subjects that have to be studied in order that the student can progress academically. Equally, where it is an elective subject, students will often adopt a more laissez-faire approach and motivation and engagement may decline. The frequency of times that the teacher meets the students will also affect the teaching approach. Whatever the situation, we have to try to maintain the students' motivation with interesting activities, encouragement and praise, songs, games, rhymes, poems, funny stories, lots of student interaction and so on. The lessons need to be interesting and, as far as possible, enjoyable.

Genuine tasks based on students own needs and interests will encourage understanding and retention. It is only through using a communicative approach and varying interaction patterns that a classroom environment can be created where students have the opportunity to carry out genuine tasks.

Depending on what appeals to their learners, there are therefore different learning styles that teachers could apply to involve the students. Teachers could also make greater use of pictures, games, laminated cards with information, the black/white board, discussions, speaking/listening activities, loud reading, drama, involve students in movement to curtail too much teacher talk time through a lecture led approach. These would maximise students' opportunities to speak in class but for activities to be appropriate, teachers should ensure that they give clear explanations and repeat instructions if need be.

Use of technology can also involve learners. Prensky (2001) metaphorically refers to digital natives (people who can use technology) and digital immigrants (those who do not feel at home with digital technology). Use of technology captivates learners' attention and breaks monotony from lecture method. Sometimes learners do not participate because they are bored but here they retain more of what they visualise. Some institutions have initiated use of technology like Power Point, use of videos/DVDs, moodle and e-learning among others to get rid of lecture method. This is relevant to my students as it makes learning interesting, authentic, active and interactive. Through e-learning one is able to post course outlines, materials, assignments, and have a forum for discussion which links use of technology with communicative approaches.

Scrivener (2005) identifies seating, grouping learners and the teacher's position as other aspects that affect classroom interaction. Classroom layout and action zones can lead to higher levels of interaction which give learners a productive experience. These could however have limitations imposed by space and school ethos. Thus these factors might be influenced by the context in which one is teaching.

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