



Activities and contests which motivate students in beginners level

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Reference Data:

Ueda, A., Komai, K., & Okuda, R. (2007). Activities and contests which motivate students in beginners level. In K. Bradford-Watts (Ed.), *JALT2006 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This study explores whether autonomous (learning) activities can enhance our students' motivation and boost their confidence in learning English. One hundred and thirty-three students of Ibaraki University participated in this study. A questionnaire survey conducted at the beginning of a course showed that 62% of the students had little or no interest in learning English and no one had confidence in English. This called for a program to motivate the students. Based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) study on motivation and MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) study on anxiety and language learning, we designed a course program to provide the students with autonomous activities in a low-anxiety classroom. An analysis of a questionnaire survey instrument distributed at the end of the course revealed that there was an increase in the students' motivation during the program.

本研究は、茨城大学の133人の学生を対象に、自律的な活動を授業に取り入れることにより学生は動機を高め、英語学習に対する自信を得られるようになるかどうかを調べたものである。授業開始時質問紙によるアンケートを行ったところ、英語学習に対する興味がほとんどない、またはまったくないと答えた学生は62%にのぼり、全員が英語に対して自信がないと答えた。そのため、これらの学生に対し、動機を高めるプログラムが必要であろうと思われた。筆者らはDeci and Ryan (1985)の動機に関する研究やMacIntyre and Gardner (1991)の言語学習に対する不安の研究を基に、不安感の少ない中で自律的活動を行う授業を計画し実行した。授業終了時再び行ったアンケートを分析した結果、学生達の動機が向上していることが確認できた。

The framework for this study is based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. Their theory claims that the need for self-determination is a key to intrinsic motivation and that it operates when autonomous learning is experienced. This theory in psychology has been applied to second language (L2) learning and the idea of autonomous learning has been incorporated into many language learning activities. There have been a number of reviews and discussions which provide evidence that L2 motivation and learner autonomy go hand in hand (Dörnyei, 2001).

Easing anxiety is another important factor for successful L2 learning. Clelment, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) report that anxiety is closely related to self-confidence and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) suggested that anxiety has negative effects on performance in L2 learning. These study results seem to predict that autonomous learning activities in a low-anxiety classroom will enhance the students' motivation.

Examined activities

Based on the aforementioned studies, we hypothesized that utilizing a range of autonomous learning activities in a low-anxiety classroom would enhance the students' motivation. In order to examine the hypothesis, we designed various activities to be used for analyses. Taking into consideration the students' proficiency, we made all the activities enjoyable and yet challenging so that the students would feel a sense of accomplishment through the work. In order to lessen the students' anxiety we created a friendly classroom atmosphere where errors would be accepted, and encouraged the students to become involved in co-operative learning. The activities we used were:

- (1) Picture Quiz Show
- (2) Recitation Contest
- (3) Listening Activities using a Textbook CD
- (4) Extensive Reading
- (5) Grammar Quizzes
- (6) Final Presentation

Student background

The participants were 133 Level one students in the Ibaraki University Integrated English Program (IEP). This is a 30-class program focused on developing four English language skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students are placed into five levels based on their proficiency: Level one is comprised of beginners and Level five represents the most advanced. Each class has about thirty students and meets twice a week. Level one in this study consisted of 4 classes and constituted approximately 5% of the total IEP students. All of the four classes were taught in English by four different teachers. A questionnaire survey conducted at the beginning of a course revealed that 62% of the students showed little or no interest in learning English and 100% showed no confidence in English (see Figure 1, Figure 2).

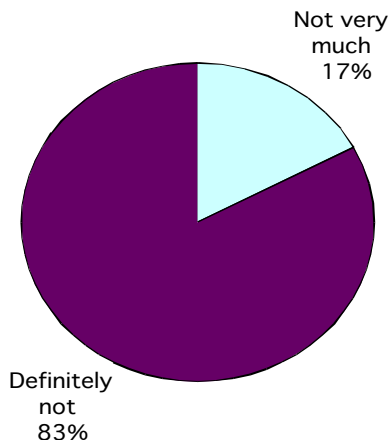


Figure 1: Course-start questionnaire
Q: Are you confident in English?

Instruments

To measure the effects of the activities, we employed a questionnaire survey, in-class observation, and analysis of the feedback from the students. The questionnaire consisted of a five-point Likert scale and open-ended questions.

Activities and contests

Activities we designed include the Picture Quiz Show, Recitation Contest, Listening Activities using a Textbook CD, Extensive Reading, Grammar Quizzes, and Final Presentation.

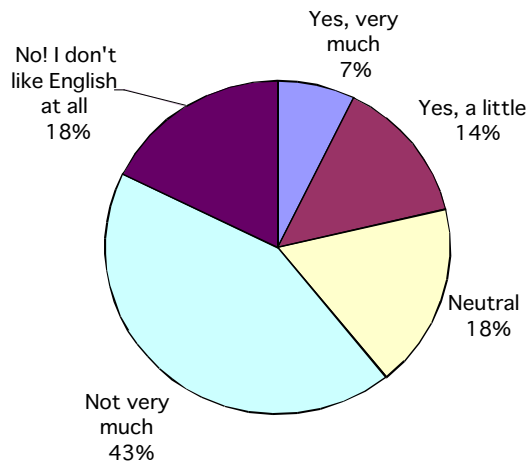


Figure 2: Course-start questionnaire
Q: Do you like English?

Picture quiz show

Collaborative learning was used to motivate the students in the "Picture Quiz Show." First the students formed groups of four to six and selected leaders. Then each group held a discussion to decide a topic for oral presentation. Next they planned how they would prepare for their presentation and arranged their schedule. Each group prepared for their presentation both in and outside class. After that, each student took or found a few pictures and created questions about the pictures and the groups thus created PowerPoint sheets as a visual aid for their presentation. They rehearsed before the presentation, checking whether they spoke clearly,

fluently, and loudly enough, whether they looked at the audience while speaking, and whether their English was easy to understand. In the presentation, presenters asked questions about the pictures and the students of other groups answered. Presenters gave hints to the audience and communicated with them in English. After the presentation, the students evaluated the other groups. The best group was chosen for the final presentation.

There are some advantages in this activity. First, collaborative learning motivated some students. Judging from classroom observation, the students enjoyed communicating with each other. According to student feedback, many students made friends with members of their groups, and they enjoyed preparing for and making their presentations. They also reported that they learned how to use PowerPoint, how to write in English, and how to make oral presentations. Second, having opportunities to speak English motivated them. Some students said that they were satisfied with the positive evaluation of their presentation. They had an opportunity to speak in front of people and they were satisfied with what they achieved through the positive comments they received. It is therefore important to guide students to find the good points in other students' presentations and to offer suggestions for improving their presentation skills.

Some students had some difficulties in preparing for the presentation. The difficulties may have demotivated them. Therefore measures to prevent such demotivation are necessary. Some students said that it was difficult for them to use PowerPoint because they had never used it before. Giving PowerPoint lessons would help. Other students said

that they could not prepare for the presentations enough. Planning by using a "schedule sheet" would help the students with time management of the project. Still other students mentioned that writing an English transcript was difficult. Peer editing sessions would help the students learn how to write better English by the advice of their peers. After that, the students could submit their transcripts to the teacher to receive his or her advice. Some students might use translation software on the Internet, so it is important to tell them not to use it because they cannot improve their writing skills if they use the software.

Recitation contest

The contest was planned to give the students a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Both group practice and individual practice successfully exposed them to a lot of English.

The contest consisted of two parts: the preliminary recitation contest in class and the final contest across level one classes. "Mouse Tales," a picture book, was chosen as reading material because all of the stories in the book are short and easy and the book is accompanied by an audiotape with music and sound effects.

The students chose one of the stories and practiced both in class and at home, listening and reading aloud following the five steps:

- listening
- overlapping
- reading aloud

- read and look up
- shadowing

These five steps were organized so that the three different language skills (listening, reading, and speaking) were used in combination at each step.

To facilitate their practice, 50-time practice cards (appendix) were given to the students. Students handed in a card to the teacher every time they completed one practice set. The students were advised to repeat practice until their sound production became smooth and natural. They were also told to practice speaking with emotion to convey the message of the story clearly.

Before the contest, the students who had chosen the same story were grouped together and helped each other to improve their pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. The stimulation the students got through the group activity made them want to learn even more.

In the class contest, students recited their stories in front of their classmates. In a supportive atmosphere, all of the students completed their performances and some skillfully put emotion into their speeches, making them vivid and exciting. The listeners were given assessment sheets and evaluated the speeches on a five-point scale, adding comments to each speaker. The best two speakers were chosen as winners for the final contest.

In the final questionnaire survey at the end of the semester, 60% of the students reported that they found the contest useful and approximately 65% responded that story memorization, shadowing, and listening to the audiotape were useful (Figure 3). Through the observation, however,

it was found that the students were under the pressure of memorization when reciting the text. In shadowing, on the other hand, they were more relaxed using the sound guide from the audiotape. This lowered their anxiety and made it easier for them to learn. Shadowing, therefore, would be a better method than memorization / recitation to achieve the goals mentioned above.

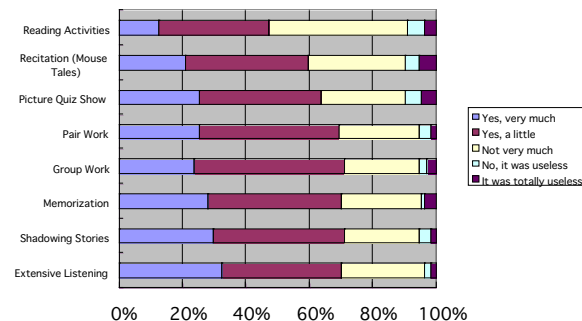


Figure 3: Course-end questionnaire
Q: Were these activities helpful for your English learning?

Listening activities using a textbook CD

Another autonomous learning task was assigned to the students. The students were asked to practice listening and reading aloud at home using a CD attached to “Interchange” textbook.” The five-step method mentioned above was used. In this method, three different activities—reading, listening, and reading aloud—were combined in a multilayered way (Appendix).

In the questionnaire completed at the end of the course, approximately 65% of the students responded that autonomous practice was useful (Figure 3). Some students reported that they became able to catch sounds which had been previously difficult to distinguish when listening.

Extensive reading

Throughout the course, students were provided with 10-30 minutes of “ER (extensive reading) Time” in each lesson. The materials for ER Time were Reading Cards (consisting of short passages and questions chosen from several textbooks) and the Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) series Stages 3 - 4. There are three major reasons why we provided ER in our classroom. Our students have had little experience of enjoying reading English passages or books. Next, the students need to have successful experiences in learning English. Third, they need comprehensible input from books they are allowed to choose by themselves. When we introduced ORT, we employed the idea of SSS (Start with Simple Stories) introduced by Sakai in 1999 (Sakai, 2002). The golden rules of this method are:

- 1) No dictionaries while reading
- 2) Skip over difficult words and phrases
- 3) Quit reading when the book is difficult or boring (Kawate and Furukawa, 2005).

Students seemed relaxed after they read a few books. Since those books were short and easy to understand, the students enjoyed and understood the contents of the books. This feeling of accomplishment alleviates the fear of reading. This

motivated students to want to read the next book. According to the results of the post course survey, approximately 60% of students became more interested in reading English books (Figure 4). The writers found they need to improve the way ER is run to be more successful and to provide enough time to read books for this activity. The teachers were not able to provide enough time for ER and should consider adjusting the amount of time allocated for each reading activity.

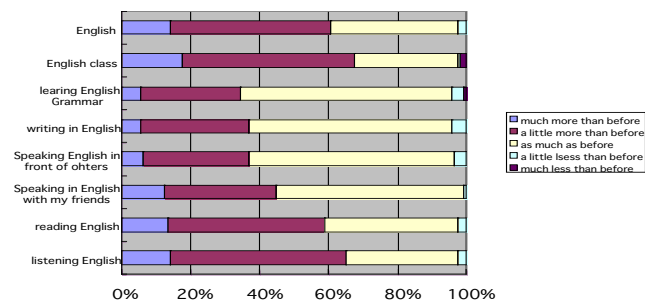


Figure 4: Course-end questionnaire

Q: Have you come to like English more than before?

Grammar quizzes

マーフィーのケンブリッジ英文法(初級編) *Ma-fi no kenbirijji eibunpo (Shokyu-hen)* and text 4 (Basic Grammar in Use) were used as self-study textbooks. The students had ten grammar quizzes through the course. They studied four units in the textbook while preparing for each quiz. If they could not get a high enough score, they had opportunities to take makeup quizzes. For the makeup exams they studied

the same units again and took the quiz. They also had many opportunities to use what they learned. There were various conversational activities in class in which they could use what they learned in the grammar book.

We thought that learning basic grammar would help the students get confidence in using English. We also considered that learning grammar using self-study textbooks would help students form English study habits and increase autonomy in learning English.

This student autonomous learning was successful in motivating the students. They studied grammar regularly for the quizzes. Many students reported that they worked very hard for the grammar quizzes. In the questionnaire, approximately 70 % of the students thought that the grammar textbooks were useful (Figure 4).

Final presentation

Final presentation consisted of two parts: Final Recitation Contest and Final Picture Quiz Show. Students elected two final recitation presenters as well as the group who performed best in Picture Quiz Show from each class. Students of the four classes got together in a hall, and all students and the teacher voted for the best presenters. Winners of the contest received small prizes.

Some students reported that seeing the performances was very stimulating to them and motivated them to learn English. The students' performances were stimulating for the teachers as well.

Conclusion

Most of the students in Level one in the program were not confident in learning English in the beginning, so we designed the activities that would motivate them. The Picture Quiz Show, Recitation Contest, listening activities using a textbook CD, extensive reading, final presentation, and grammar quizzes were created to help the students become motivated, autonomous, and confident in learning English. In this research the six activities were examined using the questionnaire, classroom observation, and student feedback. The analysis of the questionnaire, observation, and feedback found that activities successfully motivated students. Therefore, it is concluded that the hypothesis was correct. However, the activities should be improved to make students more motivated in learning English.

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Textbooks

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- *2 Richards, J.C. et al. (2005) *Interchange student book 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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Appendix

Figure 6: 50-time practice card

Let's Listen, Read and Speak! Fifty-Times Exercise										
Unit	ID:					Name:				
Listening	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overlapping	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Read It Aloud	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Read & Look Up	31	32	33	34	35					
Shadowing	36	37	38	39	40					
	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
Great! You DID it! You finished "Fifty-Times" Exercise!										
Now...										
I can do "Shadowing"	1. the whole conversation		2. most of it		3. more than half					
I can recite	1. the whole conversation		2. most of it		3. more than half					
Did you enjoy the conversation with your partner?	1. Yes, with confidence		2. Yes		3. Yes, with my partner's help					