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The Role of Active Learning in Promoting EFL Student's Communication Skills

Research Project

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Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to the love, care, and dedication of our families in supporting us and collaborating with us to succeed in life, and to all those who seek knowledge.

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Section One: Introduction

Active learning is a method of learning in which the learners are actively involved in the process of learning. Learning can be more effective when it is active, one of the reasons is autonomy in language learning. Additionally, in education students try to use it as much as possible to be a good speaker or communicator and English language teachers should give opportunity to the students in order to use the language freely in the classroom. Active learning activities are regarded as one of the effective ways to facilitate students. In addition, active learning was first defined by Bonwell and Eison (1991) as “anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing”.

The aim of this research is to demonstrate and reflect on the role of active learning in promoting EFL student’s communication skills. Additionally, it intends to point out the importance of active learning in EFL teaching and learning process.

“Active learning is the way of teaching that allows students to effectively participate in the activities that takes place inside the classroom. Such as discussions, problem solving, role plays and so on”. Pill Benson, (2013). Additionally in American education according to John Dewey (1916), in his article Democracy and Education. He wrote that “Learning means something which the individual does when he studies”. Besides “Communication skills are the abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information”. Tony Lynch, (1996).

The project is divided into four sections. First section is introduction. Second section deals with theoretical background. The purpose of this section is therefore to cover both the activities for active learning, the importance of active learning in an EFL classroom, promoting active learning strategies, types and factors affecting communication skills, and so on. And section three deals with experience and reflection. The final section of the project is conclusion, and at the end the list of references is provided.

Section Two: Literature Review

This section aims to explain the concept of active learning in promoting EFL student's communication skills. Moreover, it includes the definition of active learning, the importance of active learning in EFL learning following the definition of communication skill, types and factors affecting communication skill.

2.1 The Concept of Active Learning

"Active learning is about encouraging students to engage actively with their studies". John Hattie (2009). In addition, active learning focuses on how students learn, not just on what they learn. For that reason, teachers need to make sure that they challenge their student's thinking. With active learning, students play an important part in their own learning process. They build knowledge and understanding by doing things. Ultimately, according to an old Chinese proverb "What I hear, I forget; What I see, I remember; What I do, I understand".

As well as, students are involved in more than just listening, less emphasis is placed on transferring information and more on developing students' skills. "Students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis and evaluation), students are engaged in activities (such as reading, discussing, and writing), and more importance is placed on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values". Benjamin (1991: 68).

According to Meyers and Jones (1993: 13) "Active learning is giving students worthwhile opportunity to talk, listen, write, read, and reflect on the ideas, concepts, problems, and considerations of an academic subject". However, it's crucial to remember that traditional lecturing still has its place even though the majority of experts concur that students learn a lot when they participate in active learning. Active learning should not be attempted without content or objectives.

Simply said, “Active learning is anything that students do in a classroom that isn't just passively taking in what the teacher is saying. Through the performance of tasks and activities assigned by the teacher, students actively participate in developing their grasp of concepts, skills, and knowledge” (Meyers and Jones, 1993: 15). Student-centered learning, collaborative learning team, peer, or group learning, engaged learning, and participatory learning are some of the names that are used to define active learning.

2.1.1 The Importance of Active Learning in EFL Learning

Active learning is one of the useful strategies for EFL learners. "Regardless of the subject matter, when active learning is compared to traditional teaching methods (such as lecture), students learn more, retain the information longer, and enjoy the class more. Furthermore, active learning helps students reflect on their understanding by encouraging them to make connections between their prior knowledge and new concepts" (Meyers, 1993: 12).

Most educators nowadays agree that learners learn more when they are engaged in active learning activities as opposed to passive learning activities. We can encourage critical thinking and creativity can be encouraged in our pupils through active learning. (Bakr, 2011). Since Socrates, who promoted critical thinking by asking thought-provoking questions, active learning has been used to foster critical thinking. (Walker, 2003; Tedesco-Schneck, 2013, cited in Gholami, et al. 2014: 190).

Additionally, here are five benefits of Active learning including:

a. Increasing Engagement

"Students who are actively learning are actively engaged. They analyze ideas and develop better understanding while they are discussing, studying, or solving problems” (Whenham, 2020: 23).

b. Encouraging Risk Taking

"Students may first reject the shift to active learning; after all, it's simple to sit in class and take notes (or zone out) until the talking is over. Active learning pushes students out of their comfort zones by fostering a risk-taking environment" (Whenham, 2020). In other terms, it provides us confidence and self-control.

c. Increasing Retention

According to Tricia Whenham's experience, "Students remember about 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, but 90% of what they do". Active learning classrooms, well, they're more active. To promote their learning, students frequently apply their concepts, work on collaborative projects, or use approaches such as design thinking or the agile process.

d. Increasing Motivation

A student's desire to learn increases when they know they can play an active role in the learning process instead of passively listening to an instructor's interpretation of course material. In other words, Eddine (2013: 905) argues that "by having student step outside of their comfort zone, learn new skills, and challenge their abilities they will be able to feel a sense of accomplishment which will increase their motivation".

e. Promoting Collaboration

Tricia (2020) claims that "Many active learning strategies encourage learning experiences that include interacting with other students, either in small groups or as a class." Group collaboration, in addition to fostering meaningful connections, helps students to bounce ideas and questions off one another, allowing them to better comprehend complicated subjects.

2.1.2 The Activities for Active Learning

Active learning exercises engage students in deeper instead of just surface learning, allowing them to effectively apply and transfer knowledge. "Active learning activities stimulate the brain. It aids in the understanding and retention of knowledge" (Cybint, 2021). Listed below are some types of active learning activities:

a) Debate

According to Jagger (2013: 39). "Classroom debate acts like a powerful learning tool for increasing classroom interaction and the development of skills such as communication, argument-construction, discussion, and critical analysis". Additionally, Jagger (2013: 39) believes that "Discussion is a means of involving students in their own learning".

b) Think-Pair-Share (TPS)

The Think-Pair-Share (TPS) strategy is one of the exercises that might promote active learning in the classroom. Students in this exercise first think about a subject or problem on their own, then talk about their ideas with a peer or in a group, and ultimately present their ideas to the class as a pair or group (Mc-Tighe and Lyman, 1988: 24). It has been repeatedly demonstrated that using this method helps students learn more deeply and meaningfully.

c) Jigsaw

According to (Coelho 1992: 3, cited in Gaith and El-Malak 2004: 105) jigsaw offers an excellent learning environment for the development of academic skills through carefully planned reading and writing activities, the acquisition of language through relevant content, and the exploration of pertinent content through the use of purposeful talk in the classroom. Additionally, jigsaw exercise makes it possible to establish a setting where students actively participate more in the class and take responsibility for their learning (Hedeen, 2013: 325).

d) Class Discussion

One of the most popular methods for encouraging active learning in the classroom is discussion, and for good reason. If a course's goals are to encourage students to remember material for a long time, inspire them to study more, enable them to use what they've learned in different contexts, or improve their communication skills discussion is preferred than lecture when thinking skills are present (Mc-Keachie,1986: 124).

e) Playing Games

It is one of the greatest active learning activities. It is a fun, interesting and interactive learning method that uses a reward such as sweets or bonus marks given a motivating incentive. According to Richard Branson (2022), in his article Active Learning Strategies he writes “Group games that promote teamwork and critical thinking abilities are particularly beneficial because they allow peers who understand the content to assist weak pupils.”

2.2 The Concept of Communication Skill

The concept of communication skills is one that has been studied for centuries. According to Kay Brown (2009), it requires the ability to communicate ideas, feelings, and emotions both verbally and nonverbally, as well as to understand them. "Communication skills are essential in all aspects of life, from fulfilling interpersonal relationships to achieving professional success". (Gruba and Al-Mahmood, 2004: 101-107).

In addition, you can understand others and be understood by them If you have good communication abilities. Communication skills were defined as "the ability to transmit or exchange ideas and feelings effectively". (Susan Grover, 2005: 177-182).

On the other hand, in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, "effective communication is crucial for successful teaching. Teachers can foster a positive learning environment that promotes student engagement, cooperation, and active learning by developing excellent communication skills with their pupils and class mates". (Peter Maguire, 2002).

Finally, these abilities are necessary for public speaking, developing a confident attitude, and communicating ideas to people in daily life. Many people can advance in their careers by improving their communication skills.

2.2.1 Types of Communication

Communication can be categorized into two basic types: verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

1) Verbal Communication

According to (Ahmmed and Fazil, 2012: 150) professionals speak and listen to others for a large portion of their time. They use language as a means of communication at this period. Verbal communication is the term for this method of communication. During verbal communication an individual uses spoken and written word.

a) Oral Communication

The sender and the recipient interact face-to-face when communicating orally. This sort of communication involves the use of spoken language as a medium of communication between two or more people. Oral communication occurs when we give presentations, give speeches, take part in group discussions, show up for interviews, or simply connect with others. (Ahmmed and Fazil, 2012: 150).

b) Written Communication

(Ahmmed and Fazil, 2012: 150) define written communication is the message that transmitted via the written mode by the sender. This category includes: reports, proposals, letters, books, and emails.

2) Non-Verbal Communication

An illustration of non-verbal communication is a message that is conveyed without using words. "What we do while we speak often says more than the actual words" (Ahmmed and Fazil, 2012: 150). Non-verbal communication includes body language such as facial expressions, posture, eye contact, hand movements, and touch.

2.2.2 Factors affecting communication skill

"Communication skills are essential in our daily lives. It can also make someone more adaptable, and hence more competitive in the workplace". (Khambayat, 2017: 1-5). On the other hand, Darshan Kadu believes that "the communication skills that students develop in school are fully applicable and important across all sectors of life." Communication abilities are influenced by a number of circumstances, which both the sender and the receiver of the communication should be aware of.

One of the most important factors that affects communication skills is concept clarity. As we have seen, the existence of an idea or a concept is the beginning point for all communication. This is the idea that is turned into a message and sent to the receiver. Thus, conceptual clarity is a critical aspect influencing communication. When one's thoughts and ideas are not clear, the message formulation suffers. Communication is all about transmitting information and ideas in order to turn thoughts into actions. Poor communications result from poorly formulated concepts.

Another factor is moods and receptivity. When the communicator is enthusiastic and the receiver is receptive, communication becomes meaningful. Moods have an impact on both of them. Thus, the communicator's and listener's moods influence the communication process. The mood of the person refers to the person's state of mind or the inclination and willingness to send or receive the communication.

Language is another issue that influences communication skills. Communication occurs both orally and in writing. People, on the other hand, speak and understand diverse languages. Language serves as the medium of thought in both oral and written communication. As a result, the sender must ensure that the message is delivered to the recipient in a language that he or she understands. Direct communication exists as long as the sender and recipient of the message speak, write, read, and understand the same language.

Section Three: Experience and Reflection

This section aims to explain both experience and reflection that we gained during school and university life. Moreover, it discusses the classes that we observed and have been taught with clarification of what happened and to what degree active learning techniques in EFL classrooms was beneficial and practical.

3.1 Experience

Our experience in researching the role of active learning in promoting communication skills in EFL classroom has been eye-opening. We've discovered that there are numerous techniques and approaches that may be used to assist English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in improving their communication abilities, but active learning is one of the most successful one. Throughout our research, we have figured out how active learning activities such as group work, problem solving and games can be used to engage students with the classroom.

Moreover, during our practicum we really observed how important and how powerful active learning is. To clarify more, we observed many classes in different grades from grade one to eight, moreover, each of us taught three to five classes, grade two, three and six for a month. One of the challenges we faced was teaching a class in a traditional way in which the role of students is totally passive. Then teaching the other next lessons by using active learning activities and techniques such as games, group works, etc...

In addition, we asked the students about the lessons they like the most such as yesterday's lesson / traditional way or today's lesson / active learning. Most of the students preferred active learning than traditional one. And we asked why? The common answers were because it was fun, interesting, enjoyable. we participated more and we learned and

understood better in this way. One of the students said: "Teacher it was really fun I used English a lot with my friends and I remember everything that we did today".

Last but not least, for teachers, knowledge of different learning styles is essential to presenting information in an appealing way to students. We observed different teachers in different classes to see the way of teaching. And we asked a number of questions from different teachers including Which one do you prefer / use active learning or passive learning? and why? What are the advantages and disadvantages? etc... Depending on the answers, we found out that active learning is certainly better because it gives the student a larger role in their learning environment, increases student attention, gets students involved in the learning experience and increases critical thinking. However, it may sometimes take too much time to run different activities, for example, doing group work. Students have to change their seats and they need time to be prepared, that may make too much noise and teachers lose the control of class. On the other hand, learning still happens and takes place.

3.2 Reflection

develop their speaking and listening skills but also encourages them to take risks when communicating with others. It is clear from this research that these types of activities are essential for creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves freely without fear of judgment or criticism. As a reflection, we feel that incorporating activities such as pair work, group work, and discussions into the classroom can be extremely beneficial for language learners. Not only does it help to

Furthermore, we found out how important it is to provide feedback during these activities so students can better understand what they need to do improve upon their communication skills within the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). Giving constructive comments allows learners an opportunity not only learn more effectively but also build

confidence which will ultimately lead them towards becoming successful communicators both inside and outside the classroom setting. After passing two to three weeks we really could feel the progressive of the students.

On top of that, we believe that the main key in learning new languages is that you are able to use it in communication. According to our experience the one that should take more responsibility to achieve that is teacher. In other words, ELF classes teacher and students cooperating but the point is that teachers have more duty. they should have a good plan and well prepared to each lesson, for example designing appropriate activities that activate students, have extra material prepared, varying teaching techniques and always be supportive and helper to the students in order to maintain motivation and learning.

Section Four: Conclusion

This section aims to sum up the results and achievements of this research. Additionally, what has been found about the importance of active learning and communication skills based on our experience and reflection.

4.1 Conclusion

Depending on the result of this project, we figured out that active learning is one of the important methods of teaching. It directly involves students in the learning process, and it requires students to do meaningful learning activities, also it helps them to think about what they are doing. Moreover, it makes the learner to feel that they play an important role in their own learning through building knowledge and understanding things by doing. In addition, we have found that active learning is quite beneficial to foster learner's autonomy with increasing student engagement towards the lesson.

Nevertheless, based on the result of this study we found that communication skills play an important role in EFL classes. Developing and enhancing it needs to be taken into consideration by the teachers. Communication skills can be promoted throughout active learning when teachers can create a meaningful learning environment to help students to gain knowledge and information about the language. Then using it for communication.

Finally, we concluded that active learning is very important in learning and teaching English as a foreign language. Additionally, we figured out that active learning must be one of the basic methods that should be used by English language teachers. As it is an essential method to make students involved and engaged.

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