

Strategies of Teaching English to Adults with Low Self-Motivation

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Abstract

Self-Motivation or intrinsic motivation alongside extrinsic motivation in learners of any age is basic to the learning of English as another language. English in Nigeria remains the medium of instruction from upper primary school and beyond and the official National language among other uses. Thus, every Nigerian regardless of profession and tribe is expected to understand the language, speak it fluently and study in it. This presupposes that learners at all levels are keenly interested in it but unfortunately, the reverse is often the case as the English teaching situation is rather plagued by expressions such as: “I went to see a (another) lecturer”, “I was in class before I left to use the bathroom” and “I went to submit an assignment” being excuses made for late coming to class coupled with total absenteeism. As such behaviours from learners are clear attestations of their low self-motivation to learn English and their being oblivion of the various purposes for which they need the language. The objective of this study was to find out the reasons for such students' behaviour and to evolve the necessary strategies that would make them motivated to study English Language by engaging oral interview and observation of adult EFL students of two tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on the conclusion of the study, some teaching strategies were recommended to enhance students' self-motivation.

Keywords: *Self-motivation, Learning, Proficiency, Innovative, Teaching strategies*

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Background to the Study

Self-motivation or intrinsic motivation with extrinsic motivation in learners of any age is basic particularly to the learning of English as another language. English in Nigeria has been the medium of instruction from upper primary school and beyond and the official National language of wider communication among other uses for decades now with the expectation that every Nigerian, regardless of profession and tribe needs proficiency in it and which presupposes that learners at all levels are keenly interested in it. Unfortunately, the reverse is often the case among adult learners, particularly who no longer see the need for it while studying as a technologist, administrator or engineer for instance. The general disposition of tertiary level students is that they have had enough English language from lower education level which though is often not the case have gone ahead to find other uses for the times allocated to English by seeing other lecturers; going to submit or do another assignment, taking a break and making other flimsy excuses.

In Nigeria, English language studies is continued in the Universities and Polytechnics as well as all tertiary institutions with an upgrade of some topics earlier studied and some others never studied before to both consolidate and expand students English Language proficiency for enhanced future professionalism. Rather than being appreciative of such an arrangement and be willing to make the best of it, majority of adult students seem not to realise that they still need a further mastery of the language and make weak excuses with behaviours that attest to their low motivation to continue with English language studies. The objective of this study is to identify, the factors that cause low self-motivation to adult learners in English Language. The study also sort to make suggestions on effective strategies of teaching English to adult learners with low self-motivation

Motivation and Adult Learners of English Language

Motivation is crucial to every learning situation because it is the driving force that energises people both to want to learn and to remain interested in learning. Cherry (2018) defines motivation as the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviour. Hence, when available, goals are accomplished while when the contrary obtains, goals may either not be achieved at all or they are poorly achieved. In educational practice, therefore, teachers ought to be observant enough to notice the behaviours of their students in order to promote the goal-oriented ones and discourage the contrary ones.

Motivation is also seen as the inner and exterior factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to remain committed to a subject till its logical completion (Business Dictionary.com, 2018). The inner factors are intrinsic motivation while the external ones are extrinsic motivation according to Stedul (2018) who also opines that motivation could increase or decrease. In this regard, teachers are to always seek ways to increase the extrinsic motivation of their students to support students' intrinsic motivation. Another aspect added by Cherry (2018) states that motivation has three dimensions which are: activation, persistence and intensity which further enhance the quality of the goals achieved which implicates teachers who should always seek ways to enhance the activation of students' intrinsic motivation no matter how little persistently and intensively towards the achievements of set educational goals.

Lynch (2019) advises teachers to motivate their students in order to make learning fun. In a related development, because, no two classroom situations can exactly be the same and also because it is difficult or rather impossible to predict classroom situations for future teachers, situations always arise that warrants teachers of English to make their lessons relevant and dynamic in order to succeed (Edu-quip, 2019) which implies thinking outside the box.

Methodology

To investigate the causes of students' seemingly poor attitude towards English language studies an observation checklist was developed then 45% of the teachers of English at Kaduna Polytechnic and University of Petroleum Studies were randomly selected and engaged to chat the Checklists throughout the course of a whole semester while also questioning students as the need arose such as when late to class or not participating actively in class, upon return to class after being absent as well as failure to do whatever activity was expected of them and all responses were documented before they were subjected to contents analyses.

Findings

In the course of data analyses, the results obtained were categorised and students with low motivation made excuses in the following categories:

For late coming to class:

- “I went to see another lecturer”.
- “I was in class before I left to use the bathroom”.
- “I went to submit an assignment”.
- “I had to report at work before coming here”.

For failure to do an assignment:

- “I wasn't in school when you gave the assignment”
- “I forgot to bring it today”
- “I didn't know that we would be submitting it today”
- “I am yet to rewrite it.”

Behaviours that support poor motivation

The level of people's motivation compels them to behave in certain ways. The adult learners sampled for this presentation were oblivious of the many reasons why they needed English language and the need to be favourably disposed to learning it as a result of which consciously or otherwise, they manifested the following behaviours:

Arrived late for lectures

- Talked during lectures
- Reluctant to begin or not taking down lecture notes
- Truant
- Failed to carry out assignments
- Had low self esteem
- Not being enthusiastic
- Did not have passion for classroom activities

- Unwilling to answer questions in class
- Unwilling to be innovative
- Easily gave up on class participation
- Did not engage in research
- Saw little value in the course
- Gave more priority and attention to departmental courses
- Did not believe that their efforts will improve their performance

Students' justification for their behaviours

The adult students sampled were engaged in a discussion to determine the reasons for the behaviours which they displayed and they were of the following views that:

- They had acquired enough of English language.
- The English language they already had was enough to support the studies being undertaken.
- They didn't see the need to understand English language like the original English.

They already had a certificate showing that they passed English whereas the certificate in view would not state their performance in English.

- It was very difficult to master the language.
- They had past negative experience.
- They had other priorities.
- They saw little value in the course.
- They did not believe that their efforts could improve performance

Conclusion

When self-motivation to study English language is lacking in adult learners, teachers must consider that the situation is critical with a resolution for improvement and not relent in their efforts but continuously think outside the box to evolve necessary strategies to restore learners' self-motivation. This can be done using the following strategies

Establishing the relevance between English and students' professions

If teachers can explain how a specific subject matter or topic can relate to real-life situations, students are more likely to have a personal interest in learning it.

Choosing topics from students' professional courses

Nothing stops a teacher from taking into consideration the peculiar needs of their students and ensuring that essay topics for class room discussion or assignments originate from students' disciplines to make students realise the connection and relevance of English with their professions; allowing students to operate within their comfort zones to achieve the set goals of English Language teaching.

Knowing students by name

When students know that a teacher cannot identify them, they easily behave in ways that are unbecoming but when their names are known, they feel a higher sense of belonging and commitment to classroom activities.

Creating a good classroom atmosphere

Dornyei (1994) affirms that there is a high correlation between a positive classroom atmosphere and the motivation which enhances the achievement of students in foreign language learning. Hence, the English teacher should continuously seek ways of making students relax and comfortable in class.

Being dedicated and committed to teaching

Commitment to teaching implies being dedicated and passionate which are qualities that enhance students' motivation to learn (Altun, 2017). There is a basis for students to feel commitment when a teacher does not exude it adequately to the admiration of the students.

Extending class time on social media

These days, it is possible for teachers to make up class time using different social media platforms (Onjewu, 2015). This has the added advantage for knowing the students better with their names in addition to being able to discuss, do exercises, pass information, answer their questions or vice versa, etc. Such activities easily motivate learners as they would also be operating in a familiar zone.

Generously assigning speaking assignments to students

Teachers could call for volunteers or appoint students to take up aspects of the syllabus to research and present in class for the benefit of mastering speaking and also to earn the praise of the teacher which further enhances motivation.

Randomly picking students to answer questions

The random picking of students to answer questions in class or on social media platforms keeps them alert and gives them a feeling of belonging which also further increases their motivation to learn.

Making students understand their errors

It is always worthwhile for students to know the answers they got wrong and what the correct ones are as such could both help them to learn and at the same time be motivated towards greater success.

Always providing feedback on assignments undertaken

The provision of feedback on assignments and examination questions or during the course of classroom interaction builds the confidence of students who know that their efforts would be appropriately rewarded and also that they would be brought back on track when they go wrong.

Being patient and understanding with students

Since English language teachers already know the relevance of the knowledge they are meant to impart, they should exercise the patience and understanding necessary to motivate their students to want to learn what they teach.

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