

Positive E-Learning for Remedial Pre-adolescents: An Action Research

Mah Ngee, Lee

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia

Abstract. This study aimed to identify contextual factors that may contribute to positive learning in a group of low achieving pre-adolescents. Specifically, this study examines the learning experiences of a Remedial Class male students through group intervention on their motivation to learn English and their sense of self. A total of 19 participants [“Weak” (36.8%) and “Very Weak” (63.2%) students] were involved in an intervention programme undertaken by the researcher for 12 weeks. The researcher incorporated interactive activities in learning English using multi-media such as elementary dynamic English lessons, short movie clips, motivational power-point presentations, songs, dictionary work and synopsis-writing during library sessions. The intention is to create environments that promote positive learning for these low achieving students by incorporating practical activities that suit the school’s implementation and policy. After the programme, findings from the post-test results seem to suggest that as a whole, the participants appeared to have enjoyed lessons especially through use of multimedia. They seemed to like learning English after the programme (100%) and they appeared to feel more motivated after the program (84.2%). Results also suggest that any committed teacher would be able to motivate low achieving students in their learning outcomes. In conclusion, the study suggests that contextual factors such as learning opportunities through use of multimedia and social support such as encouragement from teachers and interaction with peers may be critical factors that contribute to positive development of students’ learning outcomes.

Keywords: Positive Learning, Motivation, Low Achievers

1. Introduction

A premier school situated in the heart of Ipoh town, Perak, Malaysia, has a population of about 2800 students per year with students ranging from Remedial to Form Six classes. The school has a reputation of being one of the top schools in Ipoh that produces excellent public examinations, namely, the Malaysia Education Certificate (SPM) and Malaysia Higher Education Certificate (STPM). Nevertheless, the school also faces problems such as academic low achievers and disciplinary problems especially among the low ability students. Therefore, early identification and prevention of low achievement may be critical, especially at secondary school level.

Having taught English for more than 25 years, both in lower and upper secondary schools, the researcher assessed the problems and school behaviour patterns which were characteristics of low achieving students in remedial classes. Compared to academic achievers, generally these low achievers had been found to fare badly in academic achievements. The researcher found that the remedial class students had poor study skills. They lacked interest and motivation in teaching and learning. In addition, they tend to give incomplete school work. They lacked personal goals and values, and low self-esteem.

As a result, the researcher had reflected on the following questions: How can the researcher provide the motivation needed to learn English? What are some of the ways of increasing the motivational level of students in learning English? Is it possible to improve the teaching and learning of English lessons through interactive “just-in-time” activities?

⁺ Mah Ngee, Lee. Tel.: + 6054688888; fax: +(05) 4667597
E-mail address: leemn@utar.edu.my

Through this action research, the researcher hopes to identify some contextual factors that may contribute to positive development among low ability students. Specifically, this study is to examine the learning experience of the Remedial Class male students through interactive “Just-in-Time” activities on their motivation to learn English and their sense of self.

2. Research Focus

The disproportionate number of preventive programmes for adolescents compounds an alarming concern for adolescents. Some researchers have maintained that the pattern of low achievement should be detected and remedied as early as possible (Ford, 1996; Butler-Por, 1987). According to Bandura (1986) repeated failures are most damaging, especially if they occur early in the course of events and do not reflect a lack of effort or adverse external circumstances. Some low achievers even show characteristics of anxiety, antisocial behaviour, emotional problems, and immature, social relationships (Butler-Por, 1987). If the patterns of low achievement were not reversed at the very beginning, the academic low achievers may suffer educational failure experiences consistently throughout their school life (Ford, 1996; Butler-Por, 1987).

Studies of positive youth development believe that every youth has the capacity for learning and healthy development (Larson, 2000). Positive development in youths can be facilitated at individual, relational, community, and policy levels (Benard, 2002; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005). Chong (2000) and Wentzel (1997) supported the importance of positive teacher-student relationships at school. The right teacher at the right time was crucial in advancing a student’s personal development (VanTassel-Baska, 2004). Positive relationships with teachers may act as a bridge between home and school cultures, helping students understand and affiliate with the school setting (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Among consistent findings in literature was that achievement was enhanced by high expectations for students coupled with a classroom climate characterised by encouragement and support (Benard, 2002; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). An especially influential factor seems to be children’s perceptions of the support they receive from peers. A number of studies have demonstrated a link between children’s perception of peer support (Hauser, 1999; Wentzel, 1997) and their self-concept (Dekovic, 1999; Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In a nutshell, early identification and prevention of low achievement may be critical, especially at secondary school level. Benard (2002) and Constantine, Benard, and Diaz (1999) posit that we can create environments that promote positive development and successful learning for young people.

3. Research Sample

The participants for the study were Remedial class male students in a premier secondary school in Ipoh. The researcher sought approval to conduct study and the selection of the samples was done purposively as these students fit the sample targeted for this study. A total number of 27 students were initially recruited for this study. However after the diagnostic tests, only 19 students were involved in the programme.

4. Execution of the Planned Action

4.1. Problem Probing

In collaboration with the school administrator, the Guidance and Counselling Unit had undertaken a programme to involve the Remedial class students in some activities as proper lessons would only start after 2.20 p.m. (Prayer Time) on Friday. The researcher found that the remedial classes, PA1 and PA2 students, had not been doing well in their academic studies. Language teachers who taught the Remedial students had indicated that some of these students could not even read and write. These students also showed lack of interest towards school. Once a full-time counsellor cum English teacher, the researcher initiated a programme called “Just-in-Time” Project especially for low ability students in the Remedial class for 12 weeks. Programme “Just-in-Time” incorporated activities that were deemed needed for students for those particular sessions as requested by the school administrators as well as by the researcher.

4.2. Analysis of the Problem Probing

At the beginning of the year, the researcher requested the English Language teachers of PA1 and PA2 to rate the students' proficiency in English in their respective classes based on their observation and classroom performance as well as their previous UPSR English grades. Altogether there were 27 students whose names were submitted to the researcher. They were categorized as "Average" ($n = 6$ or 22%), "Weak" ($n = 11$ or 40.7%) and "Very Weak" ($n = 10$ or 37.1%) students. Figure 1 shows the result of teacher-rated performance of PA1 and PA2 students.

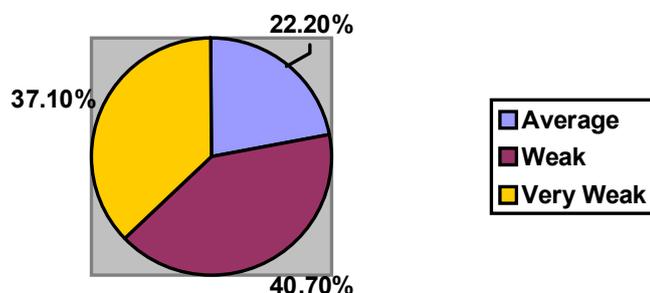


Figure 1: Teacher-Rated Performance of PA1 and PA2 Students

4.3. The Plan

Next, the researcher carried out further diagnostic pre-tests to identify the students' performance in English as in speaking, reading and written tests. After the diagnostic tests, the researcher identified 19 low ability students who were categorized as "Weak" ($n = 7$ or 36.8%) and "Very Weak" ($n = 12$ or 63.2%) students. Figure 2 shows the sample's profile after Diagnostic Pre-Tests.

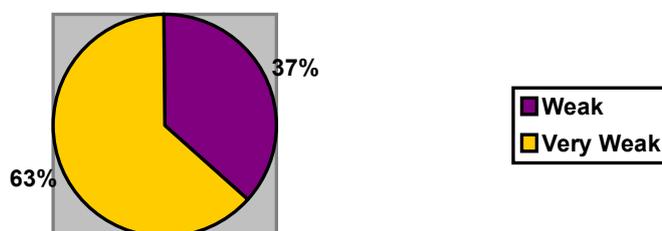


Figure 2: Sample's Profile after Diagnostic Pre-Tests

After discussion and seeking approval from the administrators, the researcher decided to plan activities that would be carried out in an 85 minutes' session every Friday from 1.05 to 2.20 p.m. for 12 weeks. The session would be long enough for interactive lesson plans to be carried out effectively and not too long as to be boring. Several activities or approaches were carried out in the teaching and learning of English through motivational and interactive activities. Generally, the activities carried out were:

- Movie clips
- Motivational Power-Point Presentations
- Finding words from dictionary
- Dynamic English lessons
- Learning English through songs
- Library session – writing of synopsis

For every session, there was a combination of the above activities in order to arouse the participants' interest and motivation to learn English. For example, the researcher would incorporate activities such as

short movie clips with New Dynamic English Level 1 from DynEd Interactive Multimedia Courseware or Motivational Power-Point Presentation with lessons from New Dynamic English Level One.

Movie clips that were used as induction to the lesson plan were short cute or humorous movies such as “The Happy Hippo”, “The Cowboy”, “Car Robot”, and “The Baby Drummer”. Motivational Power-Point Presentations were simple English slides that convey positive thinking, positive self-esteem, and positive interpersonal relationships. Children songs such as “If you are happy”, “It’s a small world” and “Clementine” were used for interactive activities and learning English through songs. As requested by administrators, the researcher also incorporated lessons on how to find words from dictionary and how to write synopsis for the Project NILAM. In short, the intention of the researcher was to create environments that promote positive development and successful learning for these participants. At the same time, the researcher also incorporated “just-in-time” activities that suit the school’s implementation and policy.

Throughout the lessons, participants would be encouraged to learn to speak simple conversational English. At the same time, the researcher would allow participants to learn important English structures: articles, countable and uncountable nouns, simple present tense, personal pronouns, and subject-verb agreement. Not forgetting the motivational factor, the researcher would instill positive values in order to give opportunity to participants for healthy development and capacity for learning English. In a nutshell, the participants would be able to experience interactive English lessons through use of various resources available in school and at the same time receive positive encouragement from the teacher during the programme.

4.4. Observation and Evaluation

The researcher made observation and evaluation on the students during the teaching and learning of English to determine whether there were attitudinal changes in students towards learning English. The effectiveness of the lessons was evaluated through observation in class, worksheets and questionnaire. During the activities in class, the researcher observed that 90% of the students were interested and were actively participating in the lesson plans. There was a lot of fun and laughter especially watching the humorous movie clips. The bored and dreamy looks were not in evidence during class participation. Simple worksheets and exercises were immediately given after each session. Most of the students would attempt to do the exercises although some of the weaker participants might need some encouragement and guidance to do their homework. Nevertheless, it was quite encouraging, given the fact that these participants were the low ability students who were initially disinterested and unmotivated before participating in the programme. At the end of the 12-week session, the researcher administered the post-test to evaluate the feedback from the students. Table 1 shows the feedback (9-item questionnaire) from students after the programme.

Table 1: Feedback from Students after the Programme

No	Items	%
1	Do you like the programme conducted?	89.5
2	Do you find the lessons interesting?	100.0
3	Do you feel that you’ve benefited from the programme?	94.7
4	Have you learned some English from this programme?	94.7
5	Do you feel more motivated after the programme?	84.2
6	Do you feel that you like to learn English more after this programme?	100.0
7	Do you think that the programme is a waste of time?	21.1
8	Do you like the teacher in this programme?	89.5
9	Do you want the programme to continue next year?	100.0

The researcher also administered students’ ranking of what they liked most about the programme using analysis of mode. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students’ Ranking of What They Liked Most

Ranking	What do you like most about the Programme?

1	Movie Clips and Power-Point Presentations
2	Dynamic English Lessons
3	Songs
4	Library Session – Writing of synopsis
5	Finding Dictionary
6	The Teacher

4.5. Reflection of the Study

From the findings of the research, the results seem to suggest that as a whole, the participants appeared to have enjoyed lessons especially through the use of multimedia. The findings show that students have ranked movie clips & motivational power-point presentations, Dynamic English lessons and learning English through songs as their first three favourites. This finding indicates strongly that the use of ICT is one of the effective means of teaching and learning English for low ability students. From the questionnaire, all the 19 participants (100%) seemed to find English lessons interesting and they seemed to like learning English more after the programme. Only two in ten participants ($n = 4$ or 21.1%) felt that the programme was a waste of time. In other words, a great majority of the students have benefited from the programme.

Altogether 84.2% (16 out of 19 students) indicated that they seemed to feel more motivated after the programme. The finding is very encouraging as the result shows that the researcher has somewhat managed to motivate the students after the programme. In the feedback questionnaire, 89.5% of the participants indicated that they liked the teacher in the programme. However when it comes to ranking of what they liked most about the programme, the teacher was placed in the sixth position (Table 2). Through this finding, the researcher felt that ANY committed teacher might be able to motivate the low ability students in their learning outcomes through interesting interactive activities and social support.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

The interactive activities carried out had to a certain extent motivated the students in their learning of English and sense of self. Through the programme, the participants seemed to be more confident of themselves. They were able to use simple English to communicate with the teacher. Through interactive activities, the students had somewhat established team-building skills with their peers. There was indeed some very positive development among PA1 and PA2 students after the 12-week sessions.

The study will be of interest to educational practice. Motivation has been found to positively influence academic achievement among urban students. The researcher hopes that this study may help administrators and teachers to understand the extent of the motivational factors on academic achievement and social behaviours of students. It is hoped that more teachers are exposed to the idea of action research to enable them to nib the problems in teaching and learning process. Through this study, it is hoped that other researchers or educators may study or develop preventive intervention programmes in changing mindset and in building capacity and competency in students.

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