Teaching with Classroom Techniques For Improving The Language Learning of Engineering Students

Aye Aye Win
Department of English Technological University, Sagaing
theintshwesenhtay@gmail.com

Thuzar Aye
Department of English Technological University, Sagaing
thuzaraye799@gmail.com

Thin Thin Soe
Department of English University of Computer Studies,Taunggyi
thinnthinnsoe1981@gmail.com

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to improve the English language learning of engineering students by classroom techniques. In the global context, English is one of the most dominating languages of the world. It impacts on every field of work. In the field of engineering education also, not only almost all engineering subjects are being taught in English but also many works of research and studies are recorded in English. In Myanmar country, because English is not mother tongue, most engineering students are reluctant to learning English. Although it is known that mastering in English is essential not only for education, but also for future careers, students have been bored in learning English until now. To develop the students' learning skills, the role of teacher is very essential. Teachers can inspire students to learn well, and motivate them to keep their academic goals on track. There are a variety of different teachings styles. Teacher who uses teaching techniques effectively may well encourage the students to be more interested in learning.
Keywords: language learning, classroom techniques, engineering, teaching

1. Introduction

Language is a means of thinking and transferring culture from one generation to another as well as from one nation to another. People learn languages in different ways. Many countries emphasize teaching languages other than the native language to its citizens. Over the last three decades, English has become the most important foreign language in the world. At present, the numbers of speakers regard English as not only the largest language by the number of speakers, but also the third most-spoken native language in the world. It is the most widely learned second language. Moreover, it is one of the official languages in almost 60 sovereign states. Nowadays, English language is used as a common means in not only clambering the ladder in their academic field but also communication to acquire information. The English language is being used as a way of communication all over the world because communication is the life blood of social. Communication skills are very essential for students who desire to carry out his/her professional practice in the global areas. If the teacher understands his or her students' learning level, it can help explain why he or she finds some activities easy or difficult, and can help their students study more effectively. In the classroom, every teacher must integrate different teaching styles with various activities that fit their students' learning styles.

2. Literature Review

For language learners, it is needed to know four skills in English: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills are the foundational skills of language learning. A house can't be built without a strong foundation. Similarly, a learner won't become a good communicator without building upon the four foundations of language learning. Mastering communicative competence in English, therefore, is important for the engineering students, not only for their academic careers but also for their professional life.

2.1. Reasons for Learning Languages

There are a number of different reasons for language study and the following list will give an idea of the great variety of such reasons.

2.1.1. School Curriculum

Probably the greatest number of language students in the world does it because it is on the school curriculum whether they like it or not. For many of these students English, in particular, is something that both they and their parents want to have taught. For others, however, the study of language is something they feel neutral about. At every technological university, English subject is being taught from first year to fourth year. Blueprint series (Intermediate, Upper Intermediate, Pre-Advanced and Advanced) are used to teach the first year to fourth year engineering students. These books are goals-based courses for the students, which prepare them to use English independently for global communication. It is divided into 4 module-based units. Each module includes two units. Every unit of this book has five lessons, all of which are arranged in developing four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and language development (Grammar, Structure and Vocabulary).

2.1.2. Advancement

Some people want to study English because they think it offers a chance for advancement in their professional lives. They will get a better job with two languages than if they only know their mother tongue. English has a special position here since it has become the international language of communication.

2.1.3. Target Language Community

Some language students find themselves living in a target language community (TLC). A target language community is a place where the inhabitants speak the language which the student is learning; for students of English an English-speaking country would be a TLC. The students would need to learn English to survive in that community.

2.1.4. English for Specific Purposes

The term English for Special or Specific Purposes (ESP) has been applied to situations where students have some specific reasons for wanting to learn the language. There are many terms for learning English, especially some are learning for occupational purposes (EOP), some are for academic purposes (EAP) and some are for science and technology (EST).

2.1.5. Culture

A foreign language is studied by some students because they are attracted to the culture of one of the target language communities. They learn the language because they want to know more about the people who speak it, the places where it is spoken and the writings which it has produced.

2.1.6. Miscellaneous

There are of course many other possible reasons for learning a language. Some people do it just for fun _ because they like the activity of going to class. Some people do it because they want to be tourists in a country where that language is spoken. Some people do it just because all their friends are learning the language.

2.2. The Importance of Teaching

When a teaching is better, learning is also better. In this section, the importance of teaching is mentioned. To help improve the students' language learning, teachers must give systematic teaching to them fully. Teaching is an important part of the process of education. Therefore, teacher is the key figure in the language course. The teacher plays a prime role in effecting student progress. Teachers must be creative and flexible to make their classes lively and effective. Including a variety of activities and topics can be a source of real motivation for the learners. It is also important to remember that teachers are teaching the learners, not blindly following the book or materials. The focus should always be on learning and lessons need to be adapted to cater for the needs of the learners. . Most of the research studies have indicated that if the teachers manage their classroom effectively, their students will achieve at a higher level and will be more interested in the class subject matter. According to Emmer and Sabornie 2015, classroom management is essential to both teachers' education and teachers' professional developments, it is crucial to keep teachers knowledge up to date. If so, they can deliver high-quality teaching.

3. Types of Classroom Activities to Enhance Students' Learning

There are many types of classroom activities for teaching-learning process. In this section, the following types of activities are proposed by the author.

3.1. Whole-class Activity

Most students and teachers have been experiencing traditional teaching style in other word the whole-class activity. In this type of activity, teacher stands in front of the students and the students listen to the teacher. Most instructions are given by the teacher. It is the most common teacher-student interaction in many cultures. If all students involve in the same activity, it is much easier for students to share their emotions such as happiness or amusement in a whole-class setting. It is especially good for giving explanations and instructions, where smaller groups would mean having to do these things more than once. While students and teachers feel secure in the whole-class activity, under the direct authority of teacher, it may not encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.

3.2. Individual Work Activity

It is a good idea precisely because students can relax from outside pressure and because they can rely on themselves rather than other people. If the students have the chance to study individually, they are in charge of their own learning and produce their idea. In this way, they can be less stressful than performing in a whole-class setting or talking in pairs and promote skills of self-reliance and investigation over teacher dependence. On the other hand, it does not encourage cooperation in which students may be able to help and motivate each other. In this type of activity, the teacher acts as a resource or tutor.

3.3. Pairwrok Activity

Pair work can be a good idea because it increases the amount of student practice. It allows the students to use language (depending of course on the task set by the teacher) and also encourages students'

co-operation which is itself important for the atmosphere of the class and for the motivation it gives to learning with others. Students can help each other to use and learn language because the teacher is no longer oppressively present as a controller. The teacher will still be able to act as an assessor, prompter or resource, of course. With pair work, then, students can practice language use and joint learning. It can be used for an enormous number of activities whether speaking, writing or reading. However, teachers sometimes worry about noise and indiscipline when pair work is used particularly with students. Pair work is used particularly with students. Pair work is frequently very noisy.

3.4. Groupwork Activity

It can be an extremely attractive idea just as in pairwork. By groupwork activity, the students can get more opportunities to use language to communicate with each other. When all the students in a group are working together to produce a topic or context, they will be communicating with each other and more importantly co-operating among themselves. A lot of teachers form groups by mixing weak and strong group. This is often a good thing for the weak students (although there is a danger that they will be overpowered by the stronger students' members of the groups and will thus not participate) and probably does not hinder the stronger students from getting the maximum benefit from the activity. Enormous potential can be offered by working in group. Groupwork can be used for oral work, task where decisions have to be taken, reading tasks, listening tasks, co-operative writing and many other things. In this type of activity, the teacher acts as a controller.

4. Proposed Other Factors that Might Help Students Progress in Language Learning

Teaching can be such a rewarding profession, but it does come with challenges. Sometimes students can seem disengaged and unmotivated. It is not needed to be worried. Teachers can use several strategies to encourage them to study. Teachers do help their students realize what they can gain by studying. The followings are the factors that might help students progress in language learning.

4.1 Finding Students' Interest and Enthusiasm

To differentiate for students' interests, teachers should find out what students care about and like to do. They allow them to choose what they want to do base on a variety of interests. Many students may share common ground, which means that there's often something for everyone. For individuals with serious disengagement issues, teachers plan useful activities around their interests. The benefit is that passive students will make the connections they need, and the others get to see the learning target from a new perspective.

4.2. Encouraging Students to Motivate in Learning

It is vital for both teacher and students to have some confidence on the way teaching and learning take place. When either loses this confidence, motivation can be disastrously affected, but when both are comfortable with the method being used, success is much more likely. As everybody knows if learners are not motivated they won't do anything well, they won't enjoy what they are doing, and they won't learn. To motivate learners, teachers need not only to use a variety of activities and make their lessons vivid and lively but also to be motivated teachers themselves.

4.3. Encouraging Students to Build Self-Confidence

For foreign language learners, foreign language anxiety is a major element which affects performances and acquisition. Self-confidence is about believing in one's own abilities. It opens doors and encourages students to take risks, express their creativity in classroom assignments and invest in the work they produce at university. A self-confident student is more likely to be optimistic and motivated and have a "can do" rather than a "can't do" attitude to classroom learning and education.

4.4. Encouraging Students to Use the Internet Effectively

To improve the quality of education, the Internet has immense potential which is one of the pillars of sustainable development. Access to the Internet can improve the educational attainments, and job opportunities. It opens doorways to a wealth of information, knowledge, and educational resources, increasing opportunities for learning in and beyond the classroom. Interactive teaching methods supported by the Internet, enable teachers to give more attention to individual students' needs and support their learning. With the help of internet, the students can get an opportunity to improve language learning.

4.5. Providing Clear Feedback on All Tests and Assignments

As a teacher, it is required to assess learners to evaluate their progress. Students will only improve if they understand how they can do better. The desire to improve is a powerful motivator. Regular checking in with the students and letting them know ways they can improve, will motivate them to work harder, and it will hold them accountable. In the author's opinion, giving feedback on the students' tests and assignments is a part of the teaching-learning process. It can motivate learners to learn English language.

4.6. Supporting the Learning Development with Skills and Knowledge of Teachers

To help improve students' language learning, the required skills of a teacher are a part of supporting factors. Good classroom management and time management skills are required for a teacher who wants his or her students to be interested in language learning. These skills help make the lesson effective. Moreover, a teacher should not only build up a good rapport, but also have great empathy with his or her students. A teacher who encourages students to motivate in language learning must have motivational skills himself or herself. He or she should have much knowledge of teaching methodology and then can apply it well while he/she is teaching. Moreover, a teacher should have knowledge about the learners and their background, educational culture, Syllabus/curriculum and learning levels of learners.

5. Data Analysis

The data were collected by using questionnaires. In these questionnaires, 10 sentences of teaching experiences concerned with classroom activities during lecturer time are included. To improve the students' language learning, the role of teacher is very important. Therefore, these questionnaires were distributed to only teachers from English Department at Technological Universities locating in different areas. In this survey, there are 25 participants who have over ten years of teaching experience. Besides these questionnaires, classroom observations are used as data collecting methods. The author asked two classes (Electrical Power Engineering and Mechanical Power Engineering) to do the same activity while she is teaching. Each class has 40 students. The students are first-year Electrical Power (EP) engineering students and Mechanical Power (MECH) engineering students at Technological University (Sagaing). The age of students is between 17 to 20.

6. Findings and Discussion

The results of data show that most teachers disagree that teachers can't teach the communication skills in pair or group work. They suggest that the exercises and practice of these skills will be more effective if done in pairs and groups. Over half of the teachers disagree that their class is too large to do group activity. They suggested that every classroom teacher should give learners more opportunities to learn the language, organizing in pair or group work is a vital in large classes. In the author's opinion, managing the setting up of the pairs, and groups, and effective monitoring are the key factors to improve learning the language. According to over 60 percent of teachers, it is important to give assessment learners when the students do classroom activity. Most teachers express that learners won't speak English when working in pairs or groups because some students are using bilingual translation. There is less chance to control them. The author thinks that every classroom teacher should encourage the students to use English language as much as possible. 76 percent of teachers agree that some learners don't contribute in pair or group activity. 84 percent of teachers agree that learners need to learn how to work together. It is needed to train and practice them about turn-taking, listening to each other and respecting ideas of others. 84 percent of teachers agree that pair work, and group work works well in multilevel classes. Teachers should encourage collaboration and group learners according to their level. Teachers (76%) agree that working in pairs and groups gives learners extra time to practice. In a class if there are 40 learners in 20 pairs they are talking at the same time. They can get extra time to learn a lot to each other. Almost all teachers agree that working in pairs or groups give learners motivation and enjoyments. 92 percent of teachers agree that working in pair or group can improve language learning of students. To identify which classroom activity is useful or not for improving the learning skills, the author gives two classes the same topic, "Experiences on My Childhood" on the blackboard. During her lecture time, she asked one class in individual work/the whole-class and another class in pair/group work. As the procedures of teaching, at first she spoke to her students about her experiences on her childhood. And then, she asked them to brainstorm the things that they experience when they were young. Then, she told her students that it is OK to be creative with their idea. According to the classroom observations, it is found that doing individual type of student work does not encourage cooperation in which students may be able to help and motivate each other. Doing in whole-class can't provide the students a chance to say anything on their own. Moreover, many students are declined to participate in front of the whole class since to do so bring with it the risk of public failure. Whole-class teaching favors the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student rather than having students discover things for themselves. By doing in pairs/group work, students are more interested in learning. It can develop team spirit and cooperation among the students. It can also provide many opportunities for practice and a variety of activities and increase the student's creativity. Each type of work that may be individual, pairs, and group have its place in the classroom. As the author's teaching experiences, pair/group type of student work is the most suitable type of teaching to improve the students' learning skills rather than other types.

Table 1. Data from Questionnaires

Item	Statement	Response (N=25)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Teachers can't teach communication skills in pairs and groups.	2 8%	3 12%	14 56%	6 24%
2	My class is too large to do pair work or group work.	5 20%	7 28%	11 44%	2 8%
3	It isn't important to give assessment learners when they do pair or group work.	3 12%	6 24%	14 56%	2 8%
4	Learners won't speak English when working in pairs or group.	2 8%	5 20%	13 52%	5 20%
5	Some learners don't contribute in pairs or group.	4 16%	15 60%	6 24%	-
6	Learners need to learn how to work together.	11 44%	10 40%	3 12%	1 4%
7	Pair work and group work works wells in multilevel classes.	4 16%	17 68%	2 8%	2 8%
8	Working in pairs or group gives learners extra time to practice.	6 24%	13 52%	6 24%	-
9	Working in pairs or group gives learners motivation and enjoyment.	18 72%	4 16%	1 4%	2 8%

Item	Statement	Response (N=25)			
		SA	A	D	SD
10	Working in group or pairs can improve language learning of students.	18 72%	5 20%	2 8%	-

Note: SA= Strongly Agree   A= Agree   D= Disagree   SD= Strongly Disagree

7. Conclusion

Everybody learns foreign language for various reasons mentioned above. In the Global World, English language is common used in communication. It is also used as the medium of teaching. To achieve effective communication skills or to surpass in communication skills, one needs to have expertise in all the four skills. Developing the interest towards the English language learning is very essential before a student acquires all these skills. In this regard, to attract the student's attention and to motivate the students in learning are becoming the responsibilities of a teacher. Before lecturing the students, a teacher has to first place himself/ herself as a learner and think from the learners' perspective. By doing so, teachers can create the interest among the students. A teacher can act different roles within a lesson. To make the learning as effective as possible, a teacher must adapt to the situation. Different teaching methods can be used depending on the nature of subject, number of students, and the facilities available in the classroom. Whatever learning styles they have, whatever their native language is, the key to acquire and master a foreign language is PRACTICE it as much and as often as possible. Therefore, classroom activities are needed to practice the students' language learning skills. Organizing the classroom to ensure the best use of the time available in a lesson is one of the roles of teacher. There are lots of different methods and approaches to teaching, but no single one is 'the best' or the 'right way." Some methods work for some people and not for other people. In the teaching-learning process, doing classroom activities not only helps the teacher to teach language skills but also provides an interesting way for the students to achieve the learning goals. The types of classroom activities, the reasons for learning, and the factors to be improved in learning are presented in this paper. It is hoped that this paper may help improve the teaching-learning process for not only teachers but also learners.

Acknowledgments

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