Motivating Students through Innovative Ideas and Effective Teaching

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Abstract

The use of in-depth small group observations and unique classroom techniques will be demonstrated in this article. The purpose is to inspire and motivate students through effective teaching methodology that incorporates creative ideas. Small group tutoring can be motivating to students because their individual needs will be taken care of. Students are awarded in diverse ways for making a quest for knowledge. This paper describes the different creative methods, such as "Tangible thinking", "Issuing personal letters", and "Student of the Day/Month", that we can use in the classroom. Alongside with these classroom activities, a well-organized lesson plan can help the instructor create a proper atmosphere for teaching. An instructor must follow the **3C**s (**C**learness, **C**orrectness and **C**onfidence) and **3F**s (**F**airness, **F**riendliness, and **F**irmness) principle when planning a lesson. In addition, choosing clear, appropriate performance-based objectives, making thoughtful and reflective deliverance of a lesson according to the students' level, optimizing the use of the whiteboard, building a relationship between the teacher and students, having an upper hand in the classroom, implementing time management, and encouraging autonomous learning, etc. are the vital criteria of effective teaching. All these elements will create an enormous impact on students' mind and their learning. Awarding teacher-generated certificates to the students as a reward of achievement can help students attain success in their future endeavors. Finally, the success of the different motivational techniques will be elaborated in this paper. The discussion is informed by different surveys carried out among both students and teachers/instructors. Survey outcomes will be highlighted before this paper is concluded.

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1.   Introduction

"Why are students not willing to attend classes?" As a teacher, I am often in search for the answer to this fundamental question. Sometimes I ask my students the same question, and sometimes I ask my fellow-teachers. The conversations often finish with putting blame on either their teachers or their students. There must be some problems somewhere that we, the teachers, are unaware of. Whether the problems are home-related or university-oriented, teachers can do a lot to inspire students, but such work is not without its challenges. I have conducted an intensive survey among a group of students and teachers of the preparatory year program of a Saudi university, and found out some interesting facts that, on the contrary to what teachers generally believe, the students are actually interested in attending classes. The main issue, however, lies within the motivation factor, which can be positively promoted by the teachers. The survey shows clearly that students are more likely to engage in learning when they see the importance of what they are learning. They need to believe that engaging in a specific classroom activity will bring about a desired learning outcome. They also need to believe that they can be successful and to perceive that the learning environment is supportive. In fact, what teachers have experienced is remarkable as well – they are often overwhelmed by the collective need of these students who really want to be motivated.

2.   Background of the Study

As motivation is one of the main criteria in teaching methodology especially with the young learners, this paper focuses on some innovative ideas and effective teaching techniques. *Motivation* is a process that can arouse and instigate behavior, give direction or purpose to behavior, continue to allow behavior to persist and lead to choosing or modifying particular behavior. I have observed the preparatory year

students' behavior of learning, carried out numerous surveys among teachers and students and ended up with some stimulating concepts of effective teaching.

3.   Does Motivation Affect Learning?

Motivating students is never an easy task, but a teacher can motivate students by using innovative ideas and effective teaching methods. There are a number of methods to motivate students and they will be discussed in this paper. At the outset, two variables should be kept in mind when motivating students, i.e. teachers' variables and students' variables. Firstly, *teachers' variables* include teachers' behavior, teaching style, structure of the course, nature of assignments and informal interaction. An instructor should be friendly and welcoming in the classroom so that students find themselves interacting with the instructor and with each other in a warm atmosphere. The structure of the course and the nature of the assignments should be designed and given according to the level of the students. In addition, *Students' variables* consist of learning style, different interests and different life experiences. Not all students' interests, lifestyles and life experiences are the same. Therefore, examples given by teachers in class should be general and suitable for the students. Two orientations can be discussed in this case. Firstly, one of them is a favorable attitude toward the target language community; possibly a wish to integrate or adapt to a new target culture through the use of a language that can be called *integrative*. The second orientation is *instrumental* – that is a more functional reason for learning the target language, such as promotion to a new class or to a new language level.

3.1   Innovative Ideas to Promote Students' Motivation

Some innovative ideas to promote students' motivation are discussed below. First of all, teachers need to provide authentic references and examples and to promote discussion in the classroom. In order to generate primary motivation,

teachers should try to create learning activities that are based on the topics which are relevant to the students' lives. Providing local examples, teaching using events in the news, using pop culture technology (YouTube, iPod, etc.) and giving real-life instances are good examples of providing authentic teaching materials.

Secondly, teachers can offer choices. Students are motivated when they feel some sense of independence in the learning process. On the other hand, students' motivation declines when they have no choice in what classroom activities they can participate. Giving your students options can be as simple as from letting them choose their lab partners or selecting from alternative assignments to as complex as signing a "teaching contract" wherein students can determine their own grading scale, due dates and assignments.

Thirdly, teachers can create an equilibrium challenge for the students. Students perform best when the level of difficulty is slightly above their current ability level. If the task is too easy, it ends up in monotony and may give a message of low expectations or a sense that the teacher believes the student is not capable of producing better work. On the other hand, an assignment that is too difficult may be seen as unachievable. This may undermine self-efficacy, and may create anxiety (Scannell, 2013). *Scaffolding* (Sawyer, 2006) is one instructional technique where the challenge level is gradually raised as students are capable of completing complex tasks.

Teachers can adopt an *affective* instructional style (Binu & Nair, 2015) that encourages students to gain autonomy. This can foster increased student interest, enjoyment, engagement and performance. An affective teaching style requires the teachers to listen, give hints and encouragement, be responsive to students' questions and show students their empathy. If there is flexibility and creativity in a classroom and if teacher rewards her students with positive feedback or gifts for

participation, then the students will enjoy their success and become enthusiastic to participate in class. To reward students, the teacher may select: Student of the Day, Student of the Week, Student of the Month and Student of the Term as well Students' Awards according to their class performance. Writing personal letters to the parents is a way to express appreciation to the students; this is another creative way to encourage students to do well in class and perhaps their parents can help reinforce positive learning taken place in the classroom.

Furthermore, *tangible thinking* helps build students' comprehension. The thinking process that involves the use of tangible objects, such as 3-D models and real objects, facilitates students' understanding. It enhances students' interest and develops their thought process.

Teacher can also use the **6C**s of Motivation principles in planning their lessons (Root, 1999). These 6Cs of promoting student motivation include: **C**hoice, **C**hallenge, **C**ontrol, **C**ollaboration, **C**onstructing Meaning and **C**onsequences. All of them are equally important to build a creative classroom environment.

3.2   Effective Teaching Strategies

Another important component of promoting student motivation is effective teaching strategies. Teachers can follow several effective teaching methods that are discussed below. The teaching strategies are an inspiration from the lesson observation guidelines produced by Taibah University (a university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

Firstly, writing learning objectives on the board at the beginning of each lesson as a lesson guide will prove to be effective. Instructors should choose before the lesson some appropriate *learning objectives* (Mager, 1997) and write them on the board before starting the actual teaching. Lesson objectives should be presented orally as well. It is very important that the objectives are performance-based and

well-explained.   Learning objectives guide the instructor what to deliver for the whole of the period; he or she will teach towards the ultimate goal of that particular lesson.   It also serves as a reminder to the instructor of the time spent in each activity.

Secondly, deliverance of the lesson is important.   Instructors should follow the **3C**s principle: Clearness, Correctness and Confidence.   A lesson plan should be made according to the level of the students.   It should relate the lesson to students' interests.   Also, reflection of lesson planning is essential in promoting students' understanding about the lecture.   The teacher should also demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the subject matter and show his or her confidence in delivering the lesson.   Once respect is earned from the students, positive learning will take place. In addition, lesson delivery should demonstrate thoughtful and reflective planning and contain resourceful materials.   Instructions given to the students should be direct and error-free.   Moreover, instructors should follow the **PPP** (**P**resentation, **P**ractice and **P**roduction) principle in conducting an EFL lesson (van Els et al. 1984). That means the lecture should be divided into three parts.   In the first part (Presentation), teachers will present the topic with elaboration.   Then the second part (Practice) will follow.   In this part, the students practice what they have learned with the help of the teacher and finally, in the third part (Production) of the lesson, students will practice independently, and teacher will check the end result.   Effective questioning techniques are very important in checking students' comprehension of the lesson.   For example, *concept checking questions* (CCQ) (Workman, 2006) should be asked after finishing the lesson; instructors should also encourage students to raise questions of their own.   Students need to be fully engaged during the lesson; therefore, no room should be left for students' personal social activities in class.

In addition, the effective usage of the whiteboard and visual aids is a must. In a classroom, we usually have a three-meter long whiteboard. If it is big enough, then we can divide it into three sections (or at least two) vertically. The first section of the whiteboard may be devoted to vocabulary meanings, notes and grammatical structure. The second section can be used for further explanation - sometimes for drawings, crosswords, oral quizzes, or puzzles – and for writing of the ideas, utterances and exercises done by students. The third section which is normally on the far right of the whiteboard can be used for recording the lesson's objectives.

Teacher-students relationship promotes effective teaching and learning. A good relationship between teachers and students flourishes a good mutual rapport and interaction between teachers and their students. Understanding students' cultural background and basic needs is also a significant factor of effective teaching. For example, if the students are Muslims of Saudi Arabia, then it may be a good idea to provide Eid rather than Christmas as an example of religious observations and celebrations. Likewise, if there is a topic of dressing-up, it may be better to talk about wearing Jalabiya (Saudi traditional dresses) or Abaya for female students. Furthermore, instructors should follow the **3F**s principle: Friendliness, Fairness and Firmness (Campbell, 2003, p. 25) in improving the classroom dynamics. In fact, instructors need to be careful when following the **3F**s principle. When a teacher is too friendly with her students, she may not have the full attention of her students. Therefore, the teacher not only has to be friendly, but also to be firm and assertive at the same time. Moreover, showing fairness among all students is very important. Otherwise, there will be a possibility that the teacher will lose his or her students' faith in him or her.

Instructors who have the upper hand in the classroom can have the full attention from their class. An instructor needs to make continuous eye contact with

the learners and to keep moving around the classroom to ensure that the students are on their toes. Also, teachers should select students randomly, and ask them to explain something which they have discussed a few minutes back. It can be a short question or it can also be something not related to what they are teaching right at that moment. It is a very powerful and effective method because students will be on full alert and pay full attention to their teacher.

A flexible communication style used in class can be effective in classroom situations. The communication between teachers and students should be open and flexible enough so that both will have an opportunity to ask or answer questions. Suitable seating arrangements made according to the class size and activities are important for effective classroom communication. Effective communication between teachers and students need good command of English, including pronunciation and intonation.

Moreover, effective time management is essential for an effective lesson. It is a very good idea to select the topics that the instructor wants to teach and to allocate a specific time for each topic that needs to be covered in a lesson. Some topics need more time and some of them need less. Depending on the students' levels, a teacher should prepare appropriate answers to every question and that will save time for the class. Consequently, a teacher should provide clear instructions and encourage students to become independent learners using effective resources, such as vocabulary cue cards prepared by students, for the lesson. Weaker students need special attention as their answers usually contain more mistakes and teachers need to mention to them in advance which topics they are going to cover so that weaker students have a chance to do some preparation work. Stronger students are almost always ready to answer teachers' questions meaning weaker students will be disadvantaged because of a lack of confidence to participate. Therefore, teachers

have to give fair time-share to every student. Instructors should involve all the students in the lesson regardless of their various levels. It is ideal to adopt the use of various teaching styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, and learning activities, such as using worksheets, group work, pair work and different language games class. Above all, teachers should encourage autonomous learning and the use of innovative ideas, and creative writing, etc. A careful lesson plan always helps the teacher to ensure a good time allocation to different activities in the classroom.

Finally, recapitulation at the end of the lesson is important. It is essential to review the lesson by referring back to the lesson objectives that have already been written on the board. Asking CCQ (concept checking questions) is an excellent way of summarizing the lesson. This is the only approach to keep students' understanding in check. According to their needs, homework will be assigned and completed before the following lesson and it is essential to cross check if students have met the deadlines and turned in their homework.

4.   Conclusion

An instructor is a person who can motivate his or her students to initiate learning and can help students to build their self-confidence. A perfect instructor not only satisfies students' need but also makes their learning visible and effective. An instructor needs to understand and care for individual student's needs. He or she also needs to be knowledgeable and resourceful so that his or her students will learn how to build learner's autonomy and acquire the knowledge that they will need in order to shape their own future. An affective and caring teacher can support his or her students emotionally and mentally and can enhance student learning and motivation in the classroom. Finally, nothing could be more positive than completing a lesson on a high note of achieving the learning objectives set at the start of the lesson. Students are motivated and content while the instructor can hold the

full attention of the class by using classroom resources and various teaching methods effectively.

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