



Bolstering Students' English Skills through a Training Course

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Abstract

This research article was conducted to: 1) strengthen students' English skills through a training course by focusing on students' idea generation, and 2) examine students' satisfactions after the training course. Using purposive sampling, 50 students selected as representatives of five faculties of Udon Thani Rajabhat University were samples of this study. To collect data, questionnaires, observation, interview, and note taking in a teacher's notebook were employed as research tools. Data acquired from a questionnaire's close-ended questions was revealed through quantitative results derived from analysis of statistical values like mean and standard deviation. Issues frequently mentioned from a questionnaire's open-ended question, observation and interview were grouped and revealed through qualitative results. According to total average mean scores of quantitative results, it revealed that the first three highest parts of student satisfactions were: students' satisfactions with teachers found at the highest level (4.69 ± 0.09), students' satisfactions with activities shown at the highest level (4.53 ± 0.06), and students' satisfactions with their emotional and behavioral progress indicated at the highest level (4.37 ± 0.10). Besides, the qualitative results stated that students felt enjoyable with the training course because they could learn working in group, make new friends and acquire new vocabulary. However, it would be better if the training course could expand more time and involve more participants.

Keywords : training course, English skill, students' satisfaction

Introduction

Strengthening students' English skills to broaden their ideas towards various English activities is still essential in present days. Students with frequent practice of English tend to have confidence to apply English in different situations well (Gaines, 2015). Besides, a lot of students are better in English because they are often motivated (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020). This motivation effects students on their idea generation which later leads to capability of creativity and also problem solving. Due to advantages of the idea generation, many educational institutes try to apply it in many academic activities. Udon Thani Rajabhat University sees importance of it, so they have approved to arrange a first English training course of the 2020 academic year. This training course covers two days – 26th July to 27th July

2020 – and contains different activities focusing on motivating students to generate their ideas towards activities. These activities are consisted of Getting to Know, Alert Thinking, Little Voice, Actionary, Pause and Predict, Top Quiz, Evolution, and Quizlet Live. All these activities support four English skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. What students acquire from this training course would be feedback and development of a future training course.

Objectives

- 1) To strengthen students' English skills through a training course focusing on students' idea generation.
- 2) To examine students' satisfactions after the training course.

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Related Literature

Student performance is generally resulted from motivation. Based on a theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, motivation works effectively when a student's need is fulfilled. Whenever a student's need is completely fulfilled, fulfilling needs in a higher hierarchy occurs (McLeod, 2013, p. 2). According to McClelland's theory of needs, it indicates that three motivators driving students' motivation are achievement, affiliation and power. These motivators do not depend on age or gender but on life experience instead. These two theories are interrelated and suitable for applying in a classroom. Therefore, to motivate student performance, it is a good idea to adopt these theories into a classroom (Osemeké & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 161).

Besides motivation, positive learning environment is one of important factors activating students to learn and broaden their ideas enthusiastically and jovially. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) defines learning environment as various physical places, diverse context and different cultures surrounding students' learning. Whenever students feel learning environment is positive or supportive, they learn better (Dorman, Aldridge, & Fraser, 2006). The positive learning environment supports students to trust others, have a sense of fun, be eager to ask questions, and deal with challenges (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). Consequently, learning environment involved with clear learning goals, appropriate contents and good feedback brings about social skills and strategies to succeed student learning outcomes (Weimer, 2009).

Research Methodology

1. Samples

Samples of this study were 50 different-major students selected by using purposive sampling. These students were representatives of five faculties (Humanities and

Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Education, Technology, and Education) of Udon Thani Rajabhat University.

2. Research Tools

1) A questionnaire: A questionnaire was a primary tool of this study. It was divided into two portions: close-ended questions with 5 point rating scales based on Likert Scale, and an open-ended question for students expressing their opinions about the study. The close-ended questions were consisted of seven parts regarding student satisfactions with: place, time, teachers, activities, English progress, emotional and behavioral progress, and further utilization. Interpreting scores derived from Likert Scale were shown as follows:

4.21 – 5.00 = Strongly Satisfied

3.41 – 4.20 = Satisfied

2.61 – 3.40 = Neutral Satisfied

1.81 – 2.60 = Dissatisfied

1.00 – 1.80 = Strongly Dissatisfied

2) An observation: An observation was used to observe students while doing each activity. Weak points or problems of each activity were noted down in a teacher's notebook and later discussed for finding solution.

3) Interview: Interview was used after completing each activity. Only a few students were purposively selected to interview. Frequently mentioned issues were also noted down in a teacher's notebook and then discussed for applying in a future training course.

4) A teacher's notebook: A teacher's notebook was used for noting down issues or problems found from observation and interview.

3. Data Collection

Data collection happened in four stages.

Stage 1: English teachers attended a meeting and agreed to arrange a training course aiming to strengthen students' English skills. The training course lied from 26th July – 27th July 2020. The training course was quite short due to a wide



spread of Coronavirus, which it was impossible to gather a lot of students to join activities together. Therefore, selecting representatives of each faculty was arisen. The implied intention of doing this was that these students would become able to transfer the acquired knowledge to other people and also apply to use in other subjects.

Stage 2: English teachers joined together to select appropriate English activities. The agreement came up with setting activities which supported and practiced students to generate their ideas towards four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. These activities were: Getting to Know, Alert Thinking, Little Voice, Actionary, Pause and Predict, Top Quiz, Evaluation, and Quizlet Live.

Stage 3: English teachers applied all the activities with students. These students were also trained to practice all the activities. While doing each activity, observing students' responses and behaviors was done. Feedback and guidance were also implemented when students were in trouble. After completing each activity, a few students were interviewed. Interesting issues and frequent problems from observation and interview were noted down in a teacher's notebook. After completing all the activities, students were asked to do the questionnaires.

Stage 4: All the acquired data were analyzed and revealed. Data acquired from the questionnaire's close-ended questions were revealed through quantitative results derived from analysis of statistical values like mean and standard deviation. Data frequently mentioned from teacher's observation, student interview, and questionnaire's open-ended question were grouped and revealed through qualitative results.

4. Data Analysis

Analyzing data was done based on the information acquired. The questionnaire's close-ended questions were analyzed through mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D). Frequent

problems and issues from observation, student interview and also the questionnaire's open-ended question were grouped and analyzed through descriptive analysis.

Results

1. Results of the Questionnaire's Close - Ended Questions:

1) Students' satisfactions with teachers;

This part was found the highest level among other parts of the questionnaire, which its total average mean score was at the highest level (4.69 ± 0.09). Considering each aspect, students had maximum satisfaction with teachers' expertise in arranging all activities (4.82 ± 0.39), followed by teachers' interaction with students (4.78 ± 0.42), teachers' capability to create learning environment jovially (4.72 ± 0.57), teachers' ability to transfer knowledge to students effectively (4.70 ± 0.54), and teachers' skill to give advice to students well (4.58 ± 0.64).

2) Students' satisfactions with activities;

The total average mean score of this part indicated at the highest level (4.53 ± 0.06) was considered the second highest level of the questionnaire. According to each aspect of this part, two activities found as students' maximal satisfactions were Top Quiz (4.62 ± 0.53) and Quizlet Live (4.62 ± 0.53). Other students' favorite activities were: Pause and Predict (4.56 ± 0.58), Alert Thinking (4.54 ± 0.54), Actionary (4.54 ± 0.54), Little Voice (4.50 ± 0.58), Evolution (4.50 ± 0.58), and Getting to Know (4.42 ± 0.64).

3) Students' satisfactions with their emotional and behavioral progress;

Students' satisfactions in this part was regarded as the third highest level of the questionnaire as its total average mean score was at the highest level (4.37 ± 0.10). Results of the 10 aspects of this part revealed that the first three aspects students satisfied the most were: accepting the others' opinions (4.58 ± 0.50), learning to work



in group (4.48 ± 0.58), and having enjoyable feelings when doing activities (4.42 ± 0.67). Other seven aspects comprised: having more assertiveness (4.38 ± 0.60), having better attitude with English study (4.36 ± 0.63), having enthusiasm in doing activities (4.36 ± 0.53), learning how to be acceptable leaders and good followers (4.34 ± 0.63), having more self-confidence (4.28 ± 0.73), having more creative skill (4.26 ± 0.66), and having skills to solve immediate problems (4.26 ± 0.75).

4) Students' satisfactions with their English progress;

The total average mean score of this part was at the high level (4.18 ± 0.14). In this part, students felt their vocabulary was improved the most (4.42 ± 0.64), followed by listening skill (4.34 ± 0.75), and speaking skill (4.24 ± 0.69). Other aspects included: creating mind mapping (4.22 ± 0.68), constructing interrogative sentences (4.20 ± 0.64), composing various sentences (4.18 ± 0.75), interpreting different sentences (4.06 ± 0.87), spelling vocabulary more correctly (4.04 ± 0.88), and pronouncing words more clearly (3.98 ± 0.74).

5) Students' satisfactions with the training place;

The total average mean score of this part was shown at the highest level (4.27 ± 0.17). According to the four aspects of this part, it indicated that students had highest satisfaction with the training place's comfortability (4.54 ± 0.61), followed by its cleanness and safety from Coronavirus (4.22 ± 0.68), its travelling convenience (4.18 ± 1.14), and its epidemic prevention measures (4.16 ± 0.87).

6) Students' satisfactions with the training time;

Students felt that time for training their English skill was too short and deficiency. Therefore, its total average mean score was at moderate level (3.32 ± 0.98), which was the lowest level among other parts of the questionnaire.

7) Students' satisfactions with further utilization;

Result of the total average mean score in this part was at the highest level (4.30 ± 0.17). Students felt that they could apply knowledge acquired from the training course in other English subjects at the highest level (4.42 ± 0.70). Besides, they could apply the acquired knowledge in other non-English subjects at the highest level (4.40 ± 0.70). However, students' capability to transfer acquired knowledge to other persons was at the high level (4.10 ± 0.76).

5.2 Results of Qualitative Data:

The qualitative data was resulted from grouping issues frequently mentioned from the questionnaire's open-ended question, teachers' observe, and student interview. The data showed both advantages and disadvantages of the training course. Advantages of the training course were: students felt enjoyable to do activities, students could make new friends, students acquired new vocabulary from their friends, students enjoyed working in group, and students' attitude with English study was better. Disadvantages of the training course were: there were little amount of participants, the time was too short, and individual activities were not suitable for students whose English was weaker than the others.

Discussion

Positive learning environment motivates students' learning skills. From the total seven parts of the questionnaire's close-ended questions, the part of students' satisfactions with teachers was the highest level – that is to say, arranging positive learning environment by teachers is effective. This result is coherent with Banks (2014) who found that creating positive learning environment must depend on teachers who had a vital role in setting arrangement, giving corrective feedback, balancing praise, comprehending levels of



language acquisition, and maintaining interaction between teachers and students in an appropriate way.

Positive learning environment also leads students to better behavior. According to the results, accepting the others' opinions, learning to work in group, and having enjoyable feelings when doing activities are the highest student satisfactions through their emotional and behavioral progress. This shows social skills provided in the training course are satisfactory. Head (2001) also discovered that learning and behavior is inextricable. To decrease student learning disruption, teachers should experience student social, emotional and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) through their behavior because better behavior leads to better learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study

1. All data acquired from both quantitative and qualitative results reflect achievement of the training course. To gain an effective training course, arranging positive learning environment with enhancement of student motivation are dominant factors. In case if a training course is quite short, teachers must take a vital role in managing all activities completely and effectively.

2. Although the study works well, recommendations for further study are also recommended. They are: 1) further research should involve more participants in order to acquire more result diversity, 2) expanding time for a future training course should be involved, and 3) comparing English improvement between students whose English skills are trained through a training course and those who have not trained through a training course should be done.

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